

## **Towards A Passion Driven Life**

About seventeen years ago, on a visit to the National Institute for the Visually Handicapped, Dehradun, I remember being woken up by the noise of children playing. When I went closer to the action, I saw a group of blind boys playing cricket with great vigour and passion. Each player in the action was identified with a Gavaskar or an Azharuddin or a Kapil Dev. It was obvious that the children were having a great time.

A few years ago I had the opportunity of travelling to Gangawati, a small township in North Karnataka. I saw a few speech and hearing disabled boys and girls practicing high jump. Each time a new height was conquered, there was great celebration. They were even more excited when they were aware of a guest watching them. They wanted to perform even better.

I remember in class 8 during the annual sports meet, I was about to take up my position for the 100 m qualifying race, when one of my teachers walked up to me and asked. Why do you take the trouble of running, you are any way going to lose. My prompt reply was, "I love running".

The teacher proved to be right, I came last. However that did not stop me from trying harder and practicing with greater vigour. The next year I surprised myself and all in the school when I qualified for the finals and won the 100 m dash in spectacular fashion. The following years, I went on to represent the school at the District, State and Zonal level athletics competitions.

Life too, I believe is a running race. We have to love it, we have to live it with passion to succeed. Life without passion is no life. Passion is often characterised by ability, recognition, involvement, goals and effort. Where do the disabled access this passion from.

Sport and art forms like music, dance, drama, writing, painting etc. have an incredible character that is intrinsic to them to draw people in and create a crave for more. As an activity, they are engaging and greatly enjoyable. There is scope for self improvement and tremendous potential of attracting recognition and appreciation.

As someone told me once, sport and art forms provide the disabled not only with an avenue for recreation, but also helps to keep them occupied and release their energies. I would go one step further to say that sport and art forms create opportunities for the disabled to express themselves, recognise some of their abilities and experience the satisfaction of achieving.

It calls for great courage, ambition, desire, discipline, dedication, determination and hardwork to excel in any sport or art. I guess these are qualities that one requires to do well in real life too. Sport and art could be very effective tools to push the disabled into lives that are motored by ambition and desire, fueled by discipline dedication and hardwork. You could well imagine where that could end up.

Sport and art are very effective tools for rehabilitation. It is unfortunate that the policy makers, administrators and the people who run institutions for the disabled have not understood the potential of sport and art. This is where I begin to wonder if these people really believe in the potential of the disabled or whether they are simply doing social work and endeavouring for their own salvation. Good cause, noble work, charity and all that, merely reflecting existing social attitudes.

It is however encouraging to note that there are a number of self help groups that have emerged in recent times who have taken up the promotion of sport and art as their mandate. There have been three Cricket World Cups for the blind that have been held in India at Delhi in 1998 and Chennai in 2002 and Pakistan at Islamabad in 2006, a Cricket World Cup for the Deaf was played at Lucknow in 2005, there have been several bilateral international cricket tours taken up by blind, deaf and physically disabled teams in the recent years. Special Olympics has emerged as a great sporting platform for persons with intellectual challenges.

In the first week of June, 2000, I was at a seminar organised by the All India Chess Federation for the Blind at Mumbai. Speaking on the topic "Chess a medium for integration" almost all the speakers were convinced about the fact that sport can be a bridge that connects the disabled with the so called able bodied. Particularly Chess as a game provides for a fair and open playing field. The speakers one after the other reiterated that once the game started, the disability was forgotten and intricacies of the sport takes over. I experienced the same during the National cricket tournaments for the blind. To begin with, spectators gather out of a feeling of curiosity, but as the game gets on its way, it is the performances and scores that people are talking about. The overwhelming response from the media and the awareness that was created by the inaugural World Cup cricket tournament for the blind held at New Delhi in November, 1998, only goes on to emphasise the point.

In recent times, significant movement has happened in the sphere of the performing arts. Shows like the Ramayana on wheels (wheelchair dance), the Magiktuch music concerts (performances by blind singers and musicians), Khatak and Bharatnatyam performances by dancers from organizations like Natyanjali, Shree Ramana Maharishi Academy for the blind clearly establishes that talent and caliber exists.

Time has come when culture, art and sport gets to be mainstreamed. This would mean that a sporting body like the Board of Control for Cricket in India should recognize cricket for the blind, cricket for the Deaf, cricket for the physically disabled and start getting involved with the promotion, management and development of these games. Likewise the IOC needs to start thinking of including the disability sport as part of their scheme of things. Inclusion is the order of the day and the disabled sports persons are as much stake holders of sport as any other citizen of the country. Hence the sporting bodies promoting a particular sport has to begin taking a more universal view of their sport.

I believe that the time is just right for Govt Ministries dealing with Sport and Culture to take notice of the existing talent and passion and starts budgeting and investing in the process of including persons with disability into the mainstream sporting and cultural scene.

To conclude, I would like to focus on the following

- Sport and art provide for very engaging and enjoyable forms of recreation for the disabled
- Sport and art can also make for very effective tools for rehabilitation and education
- Sport and art can also provide the much needed platform where the community and the world see the disabled as definite performers and potential contributing members of the society.

Art and sport are very important and necessary to help the disabled evolve as complete human beings who enjoy life, who perform, who contribute to social and community life and who can be depended upon. Power be to those who have recognised this potential.

By George Abraham  
Chairman  
Association for Cricket for the Blind in India (ACBI)  
125B, Shahpur Jat,  
New Delhi 110049

Ph:26494581  
Res: 91-120-2539606

Email:[george@eyeway.org](mailto:george@eyeway.org)