



Para Sports and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Para-Athletes in India

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Abstract:

This research article explores the transformative potential of sports in advancing societal development, with a focus on the journeys and contributions of para-athletes in India. Drawing on case studies of notable para-athletes, including Murlikant Petkar, Deepa Malik, Devendra Jhajharia, Avani Lekhara, Mariyappan Thangavelu, Amit Kumar Saroha, Rajinder Singh Rahelu, and the Indian Blind Cricket Team, this study examines how their achievements align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through qualitative analysis and synthesis of narratives, the article highlights the multifaceted impact of para-sports in promoting health, education, gender equality, economic growth, reduced inequalities, accessibility, and inclusivity. Additionally, it underscores the importance of partnerships and collaborative efforts in fostering a more equitable and inclusive society. The findings of this research contribute to the understanding of the role of sports in achieving broader development objectives and offer insights into policy implications for promoting inclusivity and empowerment of persons with disabilities.

Keywords: Para-athletes, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sports, Inclusivity, Empowerment, India

Introduction:

Sports have emerged as a powerful tool for promoting individual well-being, social inclusion, and sustainable development globally. In recent years, the achievements of para-athletes have garnered attention for their exceptional resilience, determination, and ability to overcome adversity. This article delves into the journeys of para-athletes in India, examining how their experiences align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the United Nations. By exploring the narratives of para-athletes, this study aims to shed light on the transformative potential of sports in advancing societal development and promoting inclusivity. While numerous studies exist on the sociology of sports for people with

disabilities, there's a dearth of literature specifically focusing on parasports and their intersection with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although various aspects have been explored across different sources, none have comprehensively examined the relationship between SDGs and parasports in India, particularly regarding their role in achieving SDG targets. The existing research is both limited and disjointed, highlighting the necessity for detailed case studies to gain a holistic understanding. Therefore, this research aims to pinpoint gaps in the current literature and address them, shedding light on how India is leveraging parasports to advance SDGs.

Research Objectives:

1. To analyse how the experiences of para-athletes align with the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. To Understand the broader societal impact of para-sports in promoting inclusivity and empowerment.
3. To identify participation in sports for persons with disabilities promote a more equitable and inclusive society.

Methodology:

This research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing case studies to examine the experiences and contributions of para-athletes in India. Data were collected through a review of literature, including news articles, interviews, and official reports, to construct narratives of para-athletes' journeys. The narratives were then analysed thematically to identify key themes and alignments with the SDGs.

Case Studies:



A. Murlikant Petkar (first ever medal/gold medal winner)

Murlikant Petkar's extraordinary journey and achievements align closely with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), showcasing how his life embodies broader global objectives: SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being:

Petkar's resilience and success as a Paralympic athlete serve as a beacon of inspiration for individuals with disabilities, promoting physical activity and sports for enhanced health and well-being despite challenges. SDG 4 Quality Education: Petkar's story emphasizes the importance of educating society about para-sports and the capabilities of disabled athletes, fostering inclusivity and equitable opportunities in sports through awareness and education. SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities: Petkar's transformation from a war hero with severe disabilities to a Paralympic gold medalist underscores the imperative to diminish inequalities for people with disabilities, advocating for equal opportunities and support irrespective of background or physical condition. SDG 16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions: Petkar's military service and dedication to sports exemplify the significance of peace, justice, and strong institutions. His achievements showcase the potential for individuals to overcome adversity and contribute positively to society through commitment and resilience. SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals: Petkar's eventual recognition, including the Padma Shri award and an upcoming biopic, highlights the importance of partnerships between individuals, governments, and the entertainment industry in promoting positive role models and inspiring future generations.

In essence, Murlikant Petkar's journey aligns with multiple SDGs by advocating for inclusivity, well-being, education, reduced inequalities, and the values of perseverance and dedication in achieving both personal and societal goals. His selflessness and commitment to inspiring others epitomize the principles underlying the SDGs.

B. Deepa Malik (first woman to won a medal in Paralympic Games)



Deepa Malik's remarkable journey and contributions align closely with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflecting her significant impact on societal well-being and empowerment: SDG 3 Good Health and Well-Being: Deepa's resilience in overcoming health challenges and her

achievements in parasports promote physical activity and highlight the potential of individuals with disabilities. **SDG 4 Quality Education:** Through advocacy and education initiatives, Deepa raises awareness about the capabilities of individuals facing challenges and promotes inclusivity. **SDG 5 Gender Equality:** Deepa's groundbreaking achievements in sports and efforts to empower women directly support gender equality. **SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth:** Deepa's involvement in policy-making and leadership roles promotes economic opportunities and inclusive growth for people with disabilities. **SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities:** Deepa's journey challenges stereotypes and promotes inclusivity, contributing to reducing inequalities by showcasing the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. **SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities:** Deepa's work in making urban infrastructure more accessible aligns to create inclusive communities. **SDG 16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions:** Deepa's engagement in politics reflects her commitment to contributing to strong institutions and processes for societal betterment. **SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals:** Deepa's collaborations with organizations exemplify the importance of partnerships in achieving sustainable development goals.

In summary, Deepa Malik's inspirational journey and multifaceted contributions exemplify her dedication to promoting health, education, gender equality, economic growth, reduced inequalities, accessible communities, strong institutions, and partnerships, all in alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

C. Devendra Jhajharia (won two gold medals and a silver medal)



Devendra Jhajharia, a remarkable Indian para-athlete, has not only defied the odds but also inspired countless individuals through his journey in para-sports. His achievements align closely with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. With **SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being:** Devendra's success

as a para-athlete showcases that individuals with disabilities can attain good health and well-being through sports, promoting physical activity and inclusivity in sports. SDG 4 Quality Education: His story emphasizes the importance of education and support for individuals with disabilities, highlighting how access to education and opportunities for skill development can lead to empowerment and improved outcomes. SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth: Devendra's career and participation in the workforce challenge stereotypes and promote equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities, contributing to decent work and economic growth. SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities: Through his advocacy for disability rights and inclusion, Devendra works towards reducing inequalities by raising awareness and promoting equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in society. SDG 16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions: His achievements and advocacy contribute to building more just and inclusive institutions that support the rights and well-being of people with disabilities, fostering peace and justice. SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals: Devendra's success fosters partnerships between government agencies, sports organizations, and disability advocacy groups to promote para-sports, inclusion, and accessibility, aligning to foster partnerships for sustainable development.

In summary, Devendra Jhajharia's journey exemplifies how individuals can positively impact society by overcoming adversity, breaking barriers, and advocating for social inclusion, thus contributing significantly to the broader goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda.

D. Avani Lekhara (won a gold medal at the age of 19)



Avani Lekhara's journey from adversity to Paralympic gold aligns closely with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), showcasing the transformative power of sport in promoting individual and societal development. SDG 3 Good Health and Well-

being: Despite facing physical challenges due to her disability, Avani

prioritized her health and well-being. She customized her workout



routines, and incorporated yoga and meditation for mental composure,

demonstrating resilience and determination in overcoming health obstacles. SDG 4 Quality Education:

Avani's commitment to balancing sports, academics, and family responsibilities

underscores the

importance of quality education for personal development. Her story emphasizes the value of education even for athletes and showcases the possibility of excelling in multiple domains. SDG 5 Gender Equality: Avani's historic achievements as the first Indian female Paralympic gold medalist break gender barriers in sports. Her success encourages more girls and women to pursue sports, promoting gender equality and empowerment in the athletic realm. SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities: Avani acknowledges the existing disparities in accessibility and opportunities for people with disabilities in India. Her advocacy for inclusivity in sports and society, alongside her success, contributes to reducing inequalities and promoting diversity and inclusion. SDG 16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions: Avani's journey symbolizes the triumph of the human spirit over adversity, promoting peaceful and just societies. Her story highlights the importance of supportive family institutions in fostering personal growth and resilience. SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals: Avani's belief in the potential of partnerships, particularly with private players, to advance para-athlete development underscores the importance of collaborative efforts in achieving common goals and fostering societal progress.

In conclusion, Avani Lekhara's inspiring journey exemplifies the transformative impact of sport on individual well-being and societal development, aligning closely with several SDGs and emphasizing the potential for positive change through determination, resilience, and inclusive partnerships.

E. Mariyappan Thangavelu (high jumper with leg impairment)

Mariyappan Thangavelu, a Paralympic high jumper from India, has made significant contributions aligned with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). His journey exemplifies the transformative power of sports and advocacy: SDG 1 No Poverty: Mariyappan's success has helped alleviate poverty within his family, and his story inspires others to overcome challenges for economic improvement. SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being: Through promoting para-sports and accessibility, Mariyappan encourages physical activity and well-being for individuals with disabilities. SDG 4 Quality Education: Mariyappan advocates for inclusive education alongside sports, supporting the goal of quality education for all. SDG 5 Gender Equality: Mariyappan's story can inspire girls and women with disabilities to pursue sports, contributing to breaking gender stereotypes. SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth: Mariyappan's success showcases opportunities for individuals with disabilities in the sports industry. SDG 10 Reduced Inequality: Mariyappan's advocacy addresses the unique challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, aiming to reduce inequality in sports. SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals: Mariyappan's collaborations with various organizations highlight the importance of partnerships in advancing disability inclusion in sports. Overall, Mariyappan Thangavelu's journey exemplifies how sports and advocacy can positively impact society, aligning with multiple SDGs and contributing to broader social development.

F. Amit Kumar Saroha (national level hockey player to Paralympian)



Amit Kumar Saroha's remarkable journey from a national-level hockey player to a Paralympian aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through his transition to para-sports and advocacy efforts,

Saroha has contributed to SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being: Saroha's participation in para-sports promotes physical and mental well-being for individuals with disabilities, inspiring them to lead active lifestyles for better health. SDG 4 Quality Education: As an inspirational speaker,

Sarooha raises awareness about the challenges faced by para-athletes, contributing to a more inclusive society through education and advocacy. **SDG 5 Gender Equality:** While not explicitly mentioned, Saroha's journey can encourage women with disabilities to pursue sports, breaking gender barriers in para-sports. **SDG 10 Reduced Inequality:** Saroha's achievements and advocacy work reduce inequality by providing opportunities and breaking stereotypes for individuals with disabilities, serving as a role model for marginalized communities. **SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions:** Saroha's efforts in promoting para-sports and creating partnerships contribute to building a more just and inclusive society where individuals with disabilities have equal opportunities. **SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals:** Saroha's collaboration with Jonathan Sigworth exemplifies the importance of partnerships in promoting adaptive sports and creating a more inclusive world.

Overall, Saroha's journey highlights how sports can advance the SDGs, particularly in health, education, inclusion, and reduced inequality, emphasizing the importance of creating an equitable world for all individuals.

G. Rajinder Singh Rahelu

Rajinder Singh Rahelu, despite facing polio at a young age, overcame financial hardship and societal norms to become a successful powerlifter.



His journey aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): **SDG 1 No Poverty:** Rahelu's success showcases how dedication can help individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds rise above poverty. **SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being:** His story emphasizes the importance of healthcare access and support for people with disabilities. **SDG 4 Quality Education:** Rahelu's limited education highlights the need



for inclusive education systems for individuals with disabilities. **SDG 5 Gender Equality:** While not the focus, Rahelu's story underscores the importance of empowering women from marginalized backgrounds. **SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities:** Rahelu's achievements challenge

societal norms and reduce inequalities based on physical abilities. **SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals:** His story exemplifies the power of collaboration and partnerships in uplifting marginalized communities. In essence, Rahelu's journey embodies resilience and determination while contributing to the broader goals of inclusivity and equality outlined in the SDGs.

H. Indian Blind Football Team

Mathew from Kerala is a pivotal figure in Indian blind football, serving as coach, activist, and entrepreneur. His efforts led to the development of blind football in India, notably mentoring Maraunder, now a key player. India hosts over 600 blind footballers, with Mathew earning the title "Godfather of Indian blind football." Operating from Kochi, he established a unique parasports academy. Mathew's journey began in 2013, importing specialized balls from the UK due to lack of local production. Recruitment involved NGOs and radio outreach, with former Paralympian Keryn Seal offering technical coaching. The Indian Blind Football Federation (IBFF) was established in 2016 to advance the sport nationally, with support from sporting bodies. IBFF focuses on inclusivity and skill development, offering vocational training. The narrative highlights the need for resources, inclusivity, and collaboration to foster sports talent in India, illustrated by Vishnu Vaghela's inspiring journey.

The story of the Indian Blind Football Team and Mathew's involvement resonates with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), showcasing the transformative potential of sports in driving social change and empowerment. It aligns with **SDG 1 No Poverty:** by providing vocational training and job opportunities for visually impaired individuals, thereby tackling poverty and fostering economic inclusion. Additionally, it contributes to **SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being:** by promoting the physical and mental well-being of blind athletes through sports. The

initiative also supports SDG 4 Quality Education: by emphasizing the importance of inclusive educational programs that incorporate sports and offer personal development opportunities. SDG 5 Gender Equality: is furthered by including women in blind football, breaking gender barriers in sports. Furthermore, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities: is advanced by promoting inclusivity and empowering individuals from diverse backgrounds to excel in sports. The emphasis on partnerships and collaboration underscores SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals: highlighting the need for government, public, and corporate involvement in nurturing sports talent and expanding its reach. Lastly, Vishnu Vaghela's journey underscores the importance of resilience and determination, reinforcing SDG 17's focus on multi-stakeholder partnerships and individual empowerment for achieving all other SDGs. Overall, the Indian Blind Football Team's story, led by Mathew, exemplifies how sports can address various SDGs, ranging from poverty reduction to gender equality and inclusive development through partnerships.

I. Indian Blind Cricket Team



The Indian cricket team enjoys widespread popularity and ample financial support, ensuring comfortable livelihoods for all its players, including those at lower levels. However, another cricket team from India, the blind cricket team, despite its remarkable performances, remains largely overlooked and

unsupported. In 2014, they secured a notable victory in the Blind World Cup, defeating Pakistan in the finals. Despite some acknowledgment from Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his program "Mann Ki Baat," the team continues to struggle for recognition and assistance.

The Indian blind cricket team was established in 1998 and is managed by the Cricket Association for the Blind in India (CABI), affiliated with the World Blind Council. However, funding shortages persist, and many team members face financial hardships, residing in rural areas and lacking stable

employment. Despite their challenges, players like Ketan Patel, who has dedicated years to the sport and earned accolades, struggle to find meaningful work and adequate support.

Despite their struggles, the Indian blind cricket team has achieved significant success, winning the T20 World Cup in 2012 and the ODI World Cup in 2014. They are the only blind cricket team globally to have triumphed in T20, ODI, and Asian championships, yet they remain unrecognized by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

The CABI, with support from the Samarthanam Trust, has been instrumental in facilitating the team's international participation, but their financial resources are now depleted. The team's immediate goal is to secure funding for upcoming matches, covering expenses like uniforms and coaching.

The situation of India's blind cricket team reflects several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including No Poverty, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and Reduced Inequalities. Supporting their aspirations for recognition, assistance, and improved living conditions contributes to broader efforts to achieve these SDGs and fosters a more inclusive and equitable society.

Conclusion:

The narratives of para-athletes in India illustrate the transformative power of sports in advancing societal development and promoting inclusivity. By aligning with the SDGs, para-athletes contribute to broader efforts to address poverty, inequality, and exclusion, fostering a more equitable and inclusive society. The findings of this study underscore the importance of recognizing and supporting para-athletes' contributions and highlight the potential of sports as a catalyst for social change and empowerment.

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