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EDITORIAL

Each year, the *IIC Quarterly* brings out a thematic issue that reflects contemporary concerns. These have ranged from women's empowerment, peace and security, education, to religious pluralism and urbanisation. Given this backdrop, it might appear that our choice of sport as the theme this year is unusual. However, sport is as important in our everyday lives as is education, for instance, and is integral to any society. History, culture and arts have defined India, and sport has been a part of it, dating back to pre-colonial times. As Ronojoy Sen aptly writes in his Introduction, there was life before cricket.

The list of contemporary sports played in the country is long. Besides cricket, hockey, tennis, football and badminton, Indian sportspersons have made a mark in wrestling, shooting, boxing, among many others. What is even more encouraging is that the number of women in sports, even unconventional ones like these, has increased. And this despite the discrimination women continue to face in their private and professional lives. Mary Kom made history over a decade ago in boxing, more recently, Navjot Kaur did India proud by winning the gold in wrestling. And as I write, the amazing Manu Bhaker, all of 16 years old, who just won her second gold in shooting. Hopefully the story of her journey to the top will inspire the youth of today.

Kabaddi, the age-old but forgotten sport that we all played as children, has made a comeback with the Pro Kabaddi League. It is perhaps the first time that a sport was promoted with as much fanfare as cricket, and in 2017, television viewership came a close second. Let's hope that one day all sports will get the place they deserve.

Despite this, however, sport in India still has a long way to go. The articles in this volume touch on the problems that confront the sports scenario in the region as a whole, be it corruption, faulty policies, lack of adequate financing, among several other challenges. The most significant obstacle is lack of state support. Most

sportspersons survive on determination and passion for the game, without even basic infrastructure, leave alone financial backing. Sport, therefore, remains largely the domain of the elite. Sport is not all about professional sport; it is about play, not winning, it is about enjoying a game. In fact, the word 'Sport' derives from the French *desport*, meaning leisure. What we lack is a sporting culture, and we have to patronise sport as much as we do art. Perhaps the place to start is with the youth.

It is unfortunate that sport is not a priority at home since parents are more concerned about their children's grades and future prospects. In fact this is true of most schools as well. There might be opportunities to try out for teams, but what happens to the majority of students who don't want to or who are not encouraged to? What happened to sport as an activity in school? Not everyone can or needs to be a champion, or even consider sport as a career. What is important to recognise is that without sport, a child's health is at risk, especially as our lives are becoming increasingly sedentary. The core principle of yoga, for example, is that the mind and body must be in unison for overall well-being. Further, sport teaches us to work as a team, and this is the best lesson that will hold us in good stead in life.

This volume does not claim to be a definitive account of sport in South Asia. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that along with papers on professional sport, it includes personal narratives that make the game come alive. We are grateful to the contributors who readily agreed to be part of this effort.



OMITA GOYAL

FOREWORD

The India International Centre brings out four issues of the *IIC Quarterly* every year. While two issues cover general areas, one double issue every year deals with a specific topic of interest and casts its net wide so as to get a broad spectrum of views and insights carefully chosen by a set of experts in the field. Over the years, the Centre has brought out a number of such double issues, many of which are subsequently published as hardback books. The current issue deals with an area which has been largely neglected: the sports scene in South Asia.

Sports remain one of the few activities which effectively cut across national, linguistic, religious and other barriers. India has a long tradition of indigenous sports such as wrestling, archery and kabaddi. With the advent of Western influence, of course, we have taken in a huge way to cricket—where we now excel—hockey, football, tennis, badminton and boxing. If we add chess, this is another area where we are producing grandmasters. These sports are, of course, not confined to India but are spread widely over the region.

This special issue on *South Asia's Sporting Mosaic* brings together a number of interesting essays from around the region which clearly show the universal significance of sports. The South Asian participation in the Olympic Games goes back almost a century, and although we are still not able to match the performance of other Asian countries, such as China and Japan, our sportspersons are beginning to make a significant impact on the world scene.

A special word needs to be said about yoga, which is perhaps not a sport in the classical sense, but can play a major role in developing physical fitness and mental agility, thus helping sportspersons reach their full capacity. Despite our obsession with cricket, this issue deals with a wide spectrum of other sports and, I am sure, will be read with great interest by sports lovers

everywhere. Women are also making an increasing contribution to sports in many spheres, especially badminton and wrestling. This is a good sign because if we are to catch up with other nations, Indian sportspersons will need to make a major contribution.

KARAN SINGH

