

THE SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE
Volume 2, Issue 1, 2022

Event Report

Panel Discussion in Collaboration with EKAM – SAT TRUST - VR1

Sports Promoting 'Unity in Diversity' in India: Challenges and Possibilities

The poster features a central graphic of two hands shaking, symbolizing unity. The background is split into orange and blue horizontal bands. Text in the center reads: 'In collaboration with VR1 (We-Are-One)', 'Presented by', 'Virtual Panel Discussion', 'In observance of', 'International Human Rights Day', 'on', 'Sports Promoting', '**'UNITY IN DIVERSITY' IN INDIA**', and 'Challenges and Possibilities'. Logos for JGI JAIN UNIVERSITY and VR1 are at the top. The date and time are listed as December 10, 2021, from 03:30 P.M. to 05:00 P.M.

Panelists:

- Dr. A. Ravindra**
M.A. (Soc.)
Former 'Dist' Secretary Sport of Karnataka
Chikmagalur, KST
- Kamran Abbas**
Former - JAIU Director of the University
Gurgaon (New York) District
- Ladhe Kavale**
Sikhle Sports
Mumbai, KLR

Moderator:

- Dr. Priyanka Mathia**
Associate Professor
JAIU (Jainmataji Sangh) University
Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education

Webinar Coordinator:

- Dr. K. C. Beetha**
Associate Professor
MBA (Sports) in JAIU University
Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education

Registration Link: <https://open.spotify.com/event/1R4NDQK-TomrDAR80Cvgh>

Participant coordinators and meeting details will be sent upon successful registration.
E-certificates will be issued to participants only after completing the feedback form shared at the end of the conference.

On December 10, 2021 Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CeRSSE), JAIN (Deemed-to-be University) hosted a virtual panel discussion with eminent speakers from

various walks of lives to speak on the topic titled as *Sports Promoting 'Unity in Diversity' in India: Challenges and Possibilities*. The event commemorated 'International Human Right Day' on December 10th. This event was conducted in collaboration with Ekam Sat Trust - VR1 (We-Are-One).

Sports are known to uphold the spirit of collectives. Sportspeople, at the international level, are also often earmarked for representing the team spirit of their respective countries. Thus, the medal tally in Olympics becomes as much a projection of the country's 'soft power' as it reflects the hierarchy among the sporting nations, tussling for the tally. As an invariable societal extension, therefore, a veritable association between sports and politics is established.

During the discussion, Dr. A. Ravindra, Former Chief Secretary, Karnataka and Chairperson, Ekam Sat Trust – VR1, emphasised upon the need to introduce sports education at the school level alongside highlighting the immense potential of sports as a unifying factor. Leslie Xavier who heads the sports desk at the news portal NewsClick.in, though acknowledged the strength that sports may inculcate in people, has also underlined the structural inequalities, including issues like gender and caste-based discrimination, within the sporting domain. Kaunian Abbas, a JAIN alumnus and Karnataka cricketer, on the other hand, presented the idea of 'sports as a way of life'.

Sports, by definition, carry both the components of 'unity' and 'diversity'. At the same time, India is hailed for her 'unity in diversity' ethos. Yet, with the changing times and political context the meaning associated with 'unity in diversity' vary drastically. Undoubtedly, amid the recent rise in divisive spurs along the religious-cultural lines, unity falls off the mark in the country at various levels. At an interface of sports and the Indianness, though essentially lies elements of 'unity' and 'diversity', how much the sporting system is nurturing the idea of 'unity' in contemporary India - remains at the heart of the question. Through the course of the panel discussion, the panelists addressed whether the Indian sports upholds the principle of 'unity in diversity'.

Dr. Ravindra spoke quoting the Olympic motto and ideals and how that it is important to look at sport as an engine for social change and upliftment. He also reiterated the important role sports stars can play in it, and the need for engaging with youngsters in schools and colleges

inspiring them to not just take up sports as competition but promote larger cause beyond individual pursuits -- be it in career or in the playing field.

Specifically, when it comes to sports in India, the socio-economic background of the players, the demi-godliness of Indian male cricketers, role of market, valourisation of certain sports over others, infrastructural inadequacy- are all parts of the Indian sporting 'spirit'. This 'spirit' may be defined both as an attitudinal reflection and an invisible animating force, driven by emotions.

Abbas invoked the question of inculcating the spirit of sports as 'value system' which begins at home supported by parents and nurtured by educational institutions, besides the obvious fitness and lifestyle aspects. He strongly believes that sports equip each of one of us to deal with adversities as well as victories with equal ease, while also setting the base for fulfilling journey in life. He cited his journey as youngster and experiences he gathered as a part of cricket teams he has played. He opines that despite inherent societal ills, sports have the power to bypass all of those and mould individuals who in turn will build a sound society.

Having said that, it is the same 'spirit', often bearing contrasting connotations. For example, while the 2021 Olympics Gold Medalist Neeraj Chopra is lauded for his 'win', Indian women's hockey team member Vandana Katariya's family endures casteist slurs for their 'loss'. Though the Indian Cricket team is seen as a unified force against the Pakistan Cricket team and the boys are cheered, when on the losing end Mohammed Shami is targeted for his religious affiliation. At this point, glares at us the blatant dichotomy of reactions with a 'win' or a 'loss'.

Xavier presented the ground realities which block sport from fulfilling its true potential in our society. He explained the systemic ills in the set up that deflates the idea of diversity in Indian sport. He also explained how gender disparity, regional, political and religious biases, smudge a vibrant sports-scape into a grey and bleak picture, reflective of the prevalent weather in the country. "Sport has the power to change, but sport is just a part of the larger problem that needs immediate correction, he concluded"- he says. Overall, the webinar hinted at the mutual relationship between sports and society. The panel discussion was moderated by Dr. Priyanca Mathur, Associate Professor, CeRSSE, Jain (Deemed-to-be University) and attended by over a hundred viewers.

