

# HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RECREATION FOR INDIA

C. C. ABRAHAM

Since the human organism is a psycho-physical unity the over-emphasis on the development of the intellect to the neglect of the physical, which is not uncommon in our educational system, cannot but result in unbalanced individuals. Hence the writer makes a plea for the introduction of a physical education programme for children, adolescents, women and workers in the interest of national health and progress.

Mr. Abraham is Director of Health Education, Y. M. C. A. College of Physical Education, Saidapet, Madras.

The war in Europe and the Far East have both come to an end. Man's eyes are now turned toward building an enduring peace and a better world. The peace of the world depends, to a large extent, on whether there is freedom from slavery, domination, and exploitation in Asia. India occupies a key position among the Asiatic peoples. She is conscious of this • great responsibility and has been making plans for improving the lot of nearly four hundred millions of her people. Raising the standard of living, eradication of illiteracy, education of the masses, stamping out disease, improving and conserving the health of the people, etc., are some of the important steps that are being generally suggested in order to build a new India. Elaborate post-war plans are already drawn up to make this dream a reality.

"World War No. II has proved beyond any doubt that the Indian can be built into a tough guy—to use an American phrase—if he is given the food, the training and the experience. Indian soldiers won renown and fame for their valour, courage and endurance in the East as well as in the West. To build up the health of the millions of India is a gigantic, but not an impossible task. The first step in this direction is to improve the economic status of the people and thereby the standard of living of the masses. Second, the environmental hazards to healthy living must be removed. Health

hazards are a great menace to national well-being. Professor Hill who has given an admirable analysis of the problem points out that the mortality in India at all ages, is four to eight times that of Britain, the expectation of life at birth being 26 in India, while it is 62 in Britain ; and only half the people born reach 22 years instead of 69 as in Britain. Health statistics show that 25 to 50 per cent. of the entire population suffer from malaria and millions die of preventable diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera, plague, and small-pox. A large part of the population, Professor Hill adds, is underfed ; and according to any reasonable standards the number is more than half. Of these many millions are living on the verge of starvation with the obvious result that chronic malnutrition acts with disease in a vicious circle, producing poverty and inefficiency.

Coupled with a constructive programme of improving the standard of living of the masses and the removal of the risks to healthy living like malnutrition, diseases, lack of sanitation, illiteracy, ignorance, etc., a nation-wide programme of Health, Physical Education and Recreation must be introduced.

*Brief Historical Survey.*—India has been influenced in the field of physical education by three main forces. One, indigenous being Indian and the other two, foreign being British and American.

(i) *India's own Heritage*.—A careful study of the Indian culture reveals that, for many centuries, the people of India from the Vedic era lived a life in which adequate physical growth and development were the normal outcomes of a natural life. The Aryans fought their wars and ploughed their fields, but soon settled down to a life of ease which provided ample leisure for meditation and philosophy. The vigorous physical activities, once provided by normal, natural outdoor life, gave place to a system of yogic exercises and practices. Religion was the basis of the practice of Yoga, and the supreme goal of Yoga was Samadhi or state of oneness with Brahma (God).

"Cleanliness, self-discipline of body and mind and resignation to life were some of the features of Yoga. The impression most Westerners have gained that Yoga means self-mortification and torture of the body is not true. Such aberrations are not countenanced by Yoga. The immediate goal of the Yogin was self-control and not self-torture."\*

There seems to be a consensus of opinion among physical educators in India today that, quite apart from religious beliefs, Yogic exercises are excellent keep-fit exercises for all ages and sexes, and that they have a place in our physical education programme.

Out of Yoga has come the Indian breath-holding game of Chedugudu or Kabbadi or Hu-tu-tu, played all over India under various names. Kho-Kho is another vigorous Indian team game. Nearly all of these games require no equipment.

Besides these there are numerous other minor games suitable for young and old.

Wrestling was a great national sport in ancient India. Garadies, Kalaries, Akhadas, and Talim-Khanas, which were once the gymnasias of India, promoting physical education through the art of wrestling, still continue to exist in many parts of India, reminding one of ancient Greek physical culture.

India has also received a rich heritage of rhythmic activities in the form of classical dances and folk-dances. These dances and the songs that accompany them represent the soul of India's ancient culture. In a scheme of Physical Education, adequately planned for India, the activities that are native to the soil of the country must find their rightful place because these exercises, games and dances are peculiarly Indian and through them the children of the country can express themselves naturally, and thereby interpret the culture of India to the rest of the world.

(ii) *The British Influence*.—India's association with the British people extends to well over 200 years and within this long period some of the British sports and British traditions in sports have established themselves in India. Britain's isolated position free from the turmoils of the continent of Europe enabled her to develop her outdoor sports and outdoor activities. Her free institutions, love of personal liberty and individualism tended to create and foster her great team spirit and competitive games of football, cricket, hockey, tennis, golf, track and field athletics, boating, swimming, rowing, archery, etc. The values of play and sports in moulding and developing character have been long recognised by the British people. Their public schools, colleges, and universities have set the

\**Yoga, A Scientific Evaluation* by Behenan, Ph. D., published by Martin Seeker and Warburg Ltd., London, pp. 120.

traditions in sportsmanship and fair play. Wherever they have gone, the Britishers have taken their sports and their traditions in sports with them. In this field India has really gained through her long association with them, and their games and sports have become popular throughout the country ; these games have come to stay in India. We have to admit that they have their exercise and health values. They also provide opportunities for all classes and communities of people to come together for recreation. They promote team work, team spirit, co-operation, fair play and a feeling of comradeship and *esprit de corps*, besides developing the qualities of leadership.

Britain has also introduced into India Gymnastics as adapted by Maclaren from the German system ; Swedish Drill, adapted from the Ling system ; Military marching tactics ; rhythmic exercises adapted from the Danish system ; bar-bell exercises and scout drill. All these activities have their legitimate place in a comprehensive programme of physical education.

(iii) *The American Influence.*—In the field of physical education, America has influenced practically the whole world. This influence has been widened and maintained by the Young Men's Christian Association and its International Physical Education College at Springfield, Massachusetts, U.S.A. In the space of five decades, America has sent out to India several graduates of the Springfield College as pioneers in the cause of physical education. The most outstanding contribution to India has been the twenty years of pioneering service by the late Mr. H. C. Buck. Mr. Buck founded the first Physical Education College in India at Madras in 1920. The establishment of the Y.M.C.A. College of Physical Education for training educated

young men as leaders in physical education was the beginning of scientific physical education in India.

Through the various Y.M.C.As. scattered all over India, and particularly through the Y.M.C.A. College, the concept of physical education, as understood in America, gradually permeated the whole country. The schools and colleges in practically every Province have been benefited by this.

Through a programme of physical training, games and sports in the associations, through short term courses in physical education, through demonstrations of physical activities and through lectures, the Y.M.C.A. Physical Director tried to create a new interest in Physical Education and to interpret it as it is understood in the western countries, especially America. To the Y.M.C.A. should be given the credit for introducing free play, hygienic drill and exercises and games like Volley-ball and Basket-ball ; for making physical education more interesting, attractive and useful ; and for evolving a method of combining the indigenous exercises like the Dundhals and Bhaskis and indigenous games like Chedugudu, (Kabbadi), Kho-Kho, Atya patya, etc., with western exercises and games. The establishment of the National Y.M.C.A. School of Physical Education in 1920 (College of Physical Education since July 1931) for the purpose of training educated men of high character as Physical Directors is, therefore, of the utmost significance in the history of Physical Education in the country.

*Suggested Programme of Physical Education.*—Physical education and recreation are nation-building activities. These activities can exert their maximum influence on a people only if the obstacles standing in their way are first removed.

First, the ascetic philosophy of life of the Indian people should give place to one in which life here and now is to be lived well and abundantly.

The concept of the human organism as a psycho-physical unity should be accepted. The physical basis of life, which is generally looked down upon, must receive its due emphasis and attention. India is deteriorating in health. The country is in a state of national degeneration physically. The entire mass of the people need to be roused to recognise the value of physical health and development with reference to national health and progress.

Poverty, sickness, disease, malnutrition and starvation are enemies of human progress. If a scheme of National Physical Education and Recreation is to succeed in India, such a scheme should become part of a national plan in which the standard of living of the masses is improved, and adequate food, shelter, clothing and medical help are assured.

Education in India must receive a thorough re-orientation. It must be made suitable to the genius and needs of the Indian child. The present over-emphasis on the development of the intellect to the neglect of the physical should give place to the education of the whole child, possessing a perfectly educated mind and a perfectly educated body. Physical education must have its legitimate place in this scheme of education. It must become an integral part of the total education of the child. To make this possible, there must be a re-adjustment and balancing of the curriculum of studies. More and better schools will be needed and also more and better qualified and trained teachers.

*Elementary Schools.*—All children in the elementary school (classes 1-5) should participate daily in a programme of supervised physical education activities ; and

during this period the teaching of skills, techniques and attitudes should be stressed. The minimum daily instructional period should be thirty minutes in the morning and thirty minutes in the afternoon. In addition, there should be recess periods, periods for free and supervised play, and integration of physical education activities with other phases of the curriculum.

Activities included in the physical education programme for elementary schools should be varied in nature, and should include games of simple organisation for large and small groups ; rhythmic activities including free and creative rhythms, singing games and folk dances ; hunting and chasing games ; modified athletic games ; stunts, tumbling and self-testing activities ; activities on gymnastic and playground apparatus ; mimetics and story plays. This programme of activities should be suited to the interests, needs and physical capacities of the pupils. Individual differences must be taken into account. School managements should provide equipment and supplies sufficient in amount and variety, together with adequate indoor playroom and outdoor playground facilities, to permit conduct of such a programme.

Elementary school classroom teachers should have a sufficient amount of training to enable them to conduct physical education activities suitable for elementary school children. Such training should be given in every teacher-training institution. Special training classes should be conducted for teachers already in service.

*Middle and High Schools.*—All pupils in the middle and high schools should participate in a daily programme of supervised physical education activities. The minimum time allotment for physical education classes should be the equivalent of the school's regular academic periods.

Additional time should be allotted for practice and participation periods. Timetables for physical training classes should be planned as carefully as are other class periods. They must fit into the regular school day along with other classes in such a way that every pupil may receive physical training daily. This may necessitate radical re-organisation of the entire school programme, even to the extent of starting the school day earlier; but if we are to educate the whole child we must re-organise school life in such a way that our aim may be realized.

All pupils in the school should be enrolled in physical education classes. Those who, by reason of illness or disability, are unable to participate in the more vigorous forms of activity should be assigned to classes in modified activity, or to rest, with full credit in either case. No pupil needs to be excused from physical education where such a programme is maintained.

"Work in scouting, or guiding, or in military training should be not permitted to serve as a substitute for physical education, since the objectives and the means of obtaining the objectives of each are of a divergent nature.

Classes in physical education should be small enough to permit efficient instructions. It may be suggested that twenty-five pupils per teacher per period is desirable. However, never should a class be allowed to consist of more than forty pupils per teacher. Pupils should be classified and grouped according to their several abilities.

The physical education programme should receive equal recognition with other subjects in the curriculum.

The content of the programme of physical education in the middle and high schools should be broad and varied. It

should include a variety of team games, major and minor ; a variety of individual and small team sports such as tennis, archery, handball, badminton, teniquoit, fencing, boxing, wrestling, quoits, stunts, tumbling, pyramid building, gymnastics, drills, marching, etc. ; efficiency tests and group competition ; track and field athletics ; rhythmic activities including folk dances, gymnastic dancing, etc.

The physical education instruction period should be utilized for the teaching of skills and attitudes in the foregoing programme of activities, and should not be used as a period for free and undirected play. All reasonable precautions should be taken to prevent accidents. *Habits of safety in activity should be developed.*

Supplies and equipment sufficient to organize and conduct the programme properly should be provided by school managements from funds budgetted for such a purpose. The physical education programme should not be allowed to subsist on such gleanings as the gate receipts of athletic contests, demonstrations, or student fees, but should be supported on the same basis as classes in History, English, Mathematics and other school subjects.

Adequate bathing and sanitary arrangements, dressing rooms, indoor and outdoor play facilities should be provided in each school in order to make possible the most effective programme.

Teachers of physical education should be thoroughly prepared for their duties. They should be persons with the best available training and certified as specialists. Unqualified persons must not be permitted to teach physical education.

Classes in modified activity, corrective physical education, or rest should be provided for those pupils who, because of disability or illness, may not safely participate

in vigorous activity. The medical examination and doctor's recommendation should be made the basis of assignment to this programme. Facilities for conducting the above programme should be provided in each school. The service of teachers with specialised training in corrective physical education should be available for each school.

All middle and high school pupils should change of clothing for the physical education period. Bathing should be required at the close of each physical education class. It is most unhygienic to exercise in clothing in which the person will remain after exercise. To prevent chills and fevers there should be a complete change of clothing for exercise, and the exercise should be followed by a bath and change into dry clothing.

Records of physical education work should be maintained. Just as registers, tests and measurements and records of progress are kept in other subjects, similarly attention must be paid to physical education. Such records serve as incentives to pupil and teacher, and enable us to discover whether we are realizing our aims and objectives. It may be pointed out that keeping records may not by itself be sufficient incentive. A system of credits in physical education should be introduced and such credits must be taken into consideration for promotion of a pupil. This is the only feasible way of putting physical education at par with other subjects.

*Colleges and Universities.*—In a carefully planned system of education, a student would have undergone a long period of systematic compulsory physical training by the time he reaches the University stage. The habit of regular exercise and play should, by this time, have become so universal that no further compulsion

should be necessary. Ample facilities for vigorous games and recreation under supervision ought to take the place of compulsion. But, for many years to come—about 20 years after a national system of education has been in operation—compulsion even in the University classes will be essential. At present, the great majority of the students enter college without any knowledge of games and actual instruction becomes necessary to make them "physically literate" ! Attempts to teach them and to develop in them a liking for games and sports, where they have been seriously tried, have been found to be eminently fruitful. So, a system of compulsory physical training will have to be enforced for a number of years to come, till such time when compulsion shall become unnecessary. At the same time, a minimum requirement will have to be worked out for the Universities which would be enforced in all the colleges in India. At present, even where compulsory physical training is in force, the actual programme to be followed is left to the individual colleges with the result that many colleges are satisfied with merely recording the attendance of the students without giving them an attractive programme. Universities must appoint Physical Directors who will see that the minimum standards are maintained and that an adequate programme is provided for every college student.

At the University stage, a student is physically grown up, or very nearly so, and more emphasis should be given to: the vigorous type of team games, track and field athletics, boxing, wrestling, etc., (acquatics where possible), rather than to formal exercise and apparatus work. At the same time, it is important that every student is encouraged to take up some

game, like tennis or cricket, which he can continue to play for a number of years even after leaving the college.

More emphasis must be given to intramural athletics. College athletics have come to mean college teams in the various games and sports, while the great majority are left uncared for. A programme of intramural competitions should therefore be given greater importance.

Inter-University competitions must be properly organised and conducted by experts who should form the personnel of the Inter-University Sports Board. A great deal of improvement in this direction is necessary.

Each college must have its Department of Physical Education with a Physical Director of outstanding abilities at its head. The Physical Director must have assistants and coaches for special games, according to the strength of the College. Physical Directors must be given a salary and status equal to other important teaching members on the college staff. It may be mentioned that even in British Universities the need for such Physical Directors has been felt, and that some of them have already appointed qualified men on their staff. In the U.S.A., this has been in practice for many years and the results have been very satisfactory.

From the physical and medical examinations of college students conducted by the Universities of Calcutta, Punjab and Madras, it is evident that a majority of college students suffer from some remediable defect or other. This shows the need for an efficient health education programme in the colleges. Instruction in personal and community health must be a significant phase of this programme. The college doctor and the college physical director should work out a harmonious,

co-ordinated programme of health and physical education.

*Physical Education for Girls and Women.*—The education of girls lags behind that of boys and in physical education their position is even worse. More facilities should be provided throughout the country for the education of girls. The social disabilities and customs which stand in the way of their getting their due share of out-door life, play, exercise, etc., must be removed by educating the parents and the public.

The programme for girls depends on their age. Till about the age of eleven in India, boys and girls may play the same games. They enjoy activities such as running, chasing, dodging, climbing, swinging, skipping, hopping, jumping, vaulting, swimming, etc. Games of minor organisation are also suitable for this age. Competitions between boys and girls in running, jumping, throwing, etc., are also permissible till this age.

A distinction is to be made in certain respects between the physical education to be given to the girls and the physical education to be given to the boys after this age. The distinction is based on certain biological and psychological factors associated with adolescence. Girls should avoid violent exercises, games, sports etc., indulged in freely by boys of their age. Girls could compete in running, skipping, dancing, swimming, etc., with other girls and could also begin to take part in team games such as net ball, throw ball, ring tennis, badminton, tennis, playground ball, hockey, kho-kho, atya-patya, etc. Rhythmic exercises, especially those which can be performed to the accompaniment of music and song are eminently suitable to girls as also any form of calisthenics, lezim, club swinging, tiparaya, zimma, phugadi, garba dances and many others. Indeed,

India has a rich heritage of folk and classical dances, and these should find a very significant place in the physical education programme for girls and women. Also posture training should be very much stressed.

Physical education for women after the age of twenty is very much neglected in India. So, during their school and college career, they should be taught games and exercises which they could continue in later life. Games like badminton, activities like walking, skipping, swimming, etc., can be indulged in throughout life. Keep-fit exercises also may be taken regularly.

The primary aim of education for girls should be to enable them now to be happy and healthy at their present stage of life, and as adults to be efficient members of the community ; and to make the majority become strong and sturdy mothers, able to run a home efficiently and look after their children intelligently. Their education, therefore, must be different from the present day system and should lay stress on their health, growth, and development through exercise, play, and on a sound programme of health education. Mother craft, child care, anatomy, physiology, personal, home and community hygiene, nutrition, etc., may be taught as part of their health education studies.

Educated, trained leadership is essential. Teachers trained for at least two years in Physical Education and Health Education will be required. Every encouragement should be given to the trained personnel by way of salary and status.

*Recreation for Rural Areas.*—Provision of recreation for the rural areas is the backbone of a national scheme as almost 90 per cent. of the population of India live in villages. Therefore greater facilities, aid, and direction for recreation

will have to be provided in rural areas. There still exist in rural areas, villages and small towns, the Akhadas, Gradies, Talim-khanas, which were once the centres of physical education in India. Their utility and influence should be extended. More of similar training centres with adequate facilities, equipment and leadership may be started.

Every village should be helped to develop its own recreation centre. Rural recreation leaders must be trained and appointed to initiate a community recreation programme for every village and to organise inter-village competitions, etc. Such programmes should always be promoted with the co-operation of the people. Gradually the villagers should be made to feel their responsibilities in maintaining the recreation centre as a village institution. In the early stages, financial assistance should be given to it by the Government. The shifting of the financial responsibility to the people must be gradual. The training of young villagers as community recreation leaders will be necessary in order to extend this programme to all the villages. Occasionally, all these villagers may be brought together for a common participation in a recreational programme, and such celebrations could be timed with a festival. The amount of good that will come from such recreational centres is immense, provided the leadership offered is of the right type. They provide opportunities for educated young men to serve the country and help to build up a healthy, efficient and happy India.

Rural Recreation Officers, to organise village recreation, must be specially trained in the Physical Education Colleges. The success of this scheme will depend on their enthusiasm, initiative and organising capacity.

*Urban Public Recreation.*—The Government, the Municipalities and the Local Bodies should accept the responsibility for organising public recreation through playgrounds and allied services. Here is a field of preventive medicine for building up positive health. It can counteract the evil effects of slums and slum habits, offer counter-attractions to the drink evil and other pernicious habits, and solve the problem of leisure. This can be achieved by providing plenty of open areas, especially in congested localities, with facilities for recreation and exercise. It is possible to co-ordinate public recreation and school physical education in such a way that the schools may use the facilities during the school hours and the public during the other hours. The importance and value of public recreation has been recognised in all the advanced countries. In India the need is urgent for providing all the possible facilities for people to "recreate" themselves. There should be centralised control, professional guidance and supervision, free flow of necessary equipment, organisation and co-ordination of a city-wide programme.

Proper leadership is the key to the realisation of the maximum results. The technique of imparting education through recreation and of building up health and physical fitness, has to be acquired through professional training on the broad foundation of a liberal and general education, sound character, and love of sports, games, recreation and outdoor life. A great deal depends on the choice of leaders. This field of community service should be properly explored by the Municipal and Local bodies. They should set up a separate department of recreation on a par with the other departments as in England, the U.S.A., and the U.S.S.R. There is no use treating it as an unimportant

appendage to any other department whatever may be the administrative conveniences. By that arrangement we cannot expect any drive, initiative, planning, progress and efficiency of service, especially when a lot of pioneering in the field has yet to be done.

The recreational facilities that are suggested already exist in abundance in almost all the progressive countries of the world. It is high time that the following features at least are provided in a comprehensive city-wide scheme of organised public recreation for men, women, boys, girls and children :—

1. Playgrounds and Recreation Centres (Community Centres).
2. Aquatics—Swimming Pools, facilities for boating, etc.
3. Gymnasia—for Indian and Foreign Gymnastics, Boxing, Wrestling, etc.
4. Enclosed Playing Fields such as stadii, etc.
5. Organised Fore-shores, Sand-accretions, Riverbeds, etc.
6. Organised Camp-sites outside Municipal limits but within easy reach.

*Recreation for Industrial Workers.*—The first step towards re-creating the lives of the workers and their families is to do away with the slums and provide sanitary dwelling colonies. Otherwise, the conditions and effects of slum-living are so deleterious that all the ameliorative measures taken will be wasted, without yielding substantial results. After all, by

the influx of the industries the Government and the Municipalities have been benefitted immensely, and as such there is a moral obligation on their part to solve the problem of industrial housing in a satisfactory way and to provide community centres for healthy, social and community life.

The industries should be made to pay towards securing the physical fitness and health of their workers and their families. It will ultimately contribute towards industrial efficiency, health, harmony, and maximum production. Thus it will be in the best interests of the industries themselves as well as that of the workers to legislate for a comprehensive scheme of recreation under the guidance of experts on industrial recreation, and to arrange the supervision of the same under the auspices of the Government. Organised recreation can counteract the evil effects of mechanised routine work which is characterised by monotony and repetition. A well organised programme should cater to the recreational needs of the workers inside and outside the factories, near to and away from their homes, in various types of active and passive recreational activities. A healthy working class will be an asset to the industries as well as to society.

The facilities of industrial recreation that have been suggested here are nothing Utopian. They are in vogue in almost all the progressive countries of the world. The key to its success lies in the provision of expert direction and adequate leadership. The recreational movement is a challenge to industry. Post-war India will be industrialised a great deal and the problem of industrial recreation will have to be accepted sooner or later and the sooner it is done the better it will be for all those concerned.

*Training of Leaders.*—The leadership available for promoting health, physical education and recreation in India is not anywhere near the number required for this big country. India has only 40,000 doctors—one doctor for every 9,000 of the population. More doctors means more medical colleges.

There are only five Physical Education Colleges, namely, the Y.M.C.A. College of Physical Education, Madras ; the Training Institute of Physical Education, Bombay ; the College of Physical Education, Hyderabad ; and the Lucknow Christian College of Physical Education. At a rough estimate, the total number of Physical Education teachers trained from all these training centres so far may be between 2,500 and 3,000. These figures go to show the inadequacy of the number of training colleges and trained leaders.

India needs at least one Physical Education College in each one of its Provinces and Indian States. Men and women possessing training in Health, Physical Education and Recreation are needed in large numbers. Universities, Colleges, and schools require highly educated and adequately trained physical directors and coaches. Industrial concerns want persons with training in Recreation and Health Education. Recreation leaders and playground supervisors are required for urban public playgrounds. Rural India needs thousands of community leaders for providing recreation for the millions of villagers living in the 700,000 villages.

To keep abreast with modern developments in Health, Physical Education and Recreation, India must be prepared to send out experienced men and women in the profession for post-graduate study in the West. Sweden and Denmark have

Physical Education Colleges offering a four year degree course. There are Physical Education Colleges in England which offer advance courses in Physical Education. In the U.S.A. the Columbia, the Chicago and the Stanford Universities offer post-graduate degree courses.

Indian students must be helped, as in other fields of education, with scholarships and other facilities to proceed to the West. Scholarships and studentships may

be obtained from the colleges and universities both in the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. A system of exchange of members of the faculty of Physical Education colleges in India and the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. may be arranged. The experience and training thus gained by our students in the Western countries will be of great help in the reconstruction of India to which our Statesmen are directing their time and energies.