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Dr. Amol O Deshmukh
Principal, Lokhit College of
Physical Education, Yavatmal,
Maharashtra, India

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Comprehensive study on ideological and philosophical themes in physical education

Dr. Amol O Deshmukh

Abstract

This paper examines what are referred to as the 'philosophies' of physical education (PE). In the main, teachers' 'philosophies' revolved around a number of recognisable categories of meaning in terms of the ideological themes of 'sport', 'health', 'academic value' and, albeit to a lesser extent, 'education for leisure'. One leitmotif, in particular, emerged from the interview data and that was an overriding concern, on the part of the teachers in the study, with pupils' 'enjoyment' of PE. As an academic discipline, the philosophy of sport has been in existence for a relatively short period. Although the philosophy of sport as an academic endeavour is relatively young, the philosophical view of sport itself is not new. Although sport was a major activity according to the Greeks and Romans, it lost its importance during the Middle Ages. After the Renaissance, education came to be seen as a necessity. With its incorporation and utilisation in the educational curriculum, physical education obviously became more common in the curricula of the Renaissance and Reformation than it had been in the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Ethics, values, renaissance, physical education and sports

Introduction

Philosophy of Physical Education

Philosophy is a field of inquiry that attempts to help individuals evaluate in a satisfying and meaningful manner their relationships to the universe. A philosophy of physical education and sport explains the relationship between physical education and sport and general education. The word Philosophy literally means love of wisdom; this tells us something about the nature of philosophy, but not much, because many disciplines seek wisdom. How does philosophy differ from these other disciplines? A brief look at the historical development of the field will help us to answer this question. On the standard way of telling the story, humanity's first systematic inquiries took place within a mythological or religious framework: wisdom ultimately was to be derived from sacred traditions and from individuals thought to possess privileged access to a supernatural realm, whose own access to wisdom, in turn, generally was not questioned. However, starting in the sixth century BCE, there appeared in ancient Greece a series of thinkers whose inquiries were comparatively secular. Presumably, these thinkers conducted their inquiries through reason and observation, rather than through tradition or revelation. These thinkers were the first philosophers. Although this picture is admittedly simplistic, the basic distinction has stuck: philosophy in its most primeval form is considered nothing less than secular inquiry itself.

However, there are now many forms of secular inquiry, so what distinguishes philosophy from them? In the beginning, there was perhaps no distinction. But, as civilization advanced, two parts of philosophy became so powerful in their own right that they separated off, claiming for themselves the status of independent disciplines. Mathematics was the first, and split off very early in the game; science (or natural philosophy, as it was called even into the nineteenth century) was the second, splitting off much later. To modern philosophy is left whatever questions these two disciplines cannot solve (at least at a given time), including not only questions that are traditionally thought to be beyond the two (e.g. "What is the meaning of life?"), but also theoretical questions at their fringes (e.g. "Can natural selection operate at the species level?") and conceptual questions at their foundations (e.g. "What is science?").

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Amol O Deshmukh
Principal, Lokhit College of
Physical Education, Yavatmal,
Maharashtra, India

Philosophy, of course, is best known for the first class of questions, which includes some of the most difficult and important questions there are, such as whether or not there is a god, how one can know anything at all, and how a person ought to live.

Philosophy is characterized as much by its methods as by its subject matter. Although philosophers deal with speculative issues that generally are not subject to investigation through experimental test, and philosophy therefore is more fully conceptual than science, philosophy properly done is not mere speculation. Philosophers, just like scientists, formulate hypotheses which ultimately must answer to reason and evidence. This is one of the things that differentiates philosophy from poetry and mysticism, despite its not being a science.

A philosophy of physical education and sport will help the professional explain that the objectives of physical education and sport are closely related to the objectives of general education. A philosophy of physical education and sport that enunciates basic goals will give evidence that the profession has objectives related to those of general education.

In the words of Freeman, "At the heart of the entire resulting, physical education programme is the philosophy of the programme, for philosophy enters the planning process in developing a programme at the earliest stages and thus determines the areas that will be emphasized within a particular programme. Because of the crucial part philosophy plays in planning the programme the personal philosophy of each person involved should be clearly thought out as possible for philosophy's ultimate effect on the programme is considerable." Since physical education has been accepted as an integral part of education, almost all philosophies of education contribute some stuff to the making an eclectic philosophy of physical education.

Indian Philosophy and Culture

Indian philosophy (Sanskrit: darshana) refers to the philosophical traditions of the Indian subcontinent. Since the late medieval age (ca.1000-1500) schools of Indian philosophical thought have been identified as either orthodox (astika) or non-orthodox (nastika) depending on whether they regard the Vedas as an infallible source of knowledge. There are six schools of orthodox Hindu philosophy-Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta-and three heterodox schools-Jain, Buddhist and Carvaka. However there are other methods of classification; Vidyaranya for instance identifies sixteen schools of Indian philosophy by including those that belong to the Saiva and Rasesvara traditions.

The main schools of Indian philosophy were formalised chiefly between 1000 BC to the early centuries AD. According to philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan the earliest of these, which date back to the composition of the Upanisads in the later Vedic period, constitute "the earliest philosophical compositions of the world." Competition and integration between the various schools was intense during their formative years, especially between 800 BC and 200 AD. Some schools like the Jain, Buddhist, Shaiva and Advaita survived, but others like Samkhya and Ajivika did not; they were either assimilated or went extinct. Subsequent centuries produced commentaries and reformulations continuing up to as late as the 20th century by Aurobindo and Prabhupada among others.

For Indian philosophers (darsanika) of antiquity, philosophy was a practical necessity that needed to be cultivated to understand how life can best be led. It was thus customary for

them to explain how their ideas and treatises served human ends. Indian philosophy is distinctive in its application of analytical rigour to metaphysical problems. It goes into very precise detail about the nature of reality, the structure and function of the human psyche, and how the relationship between the two have important implications for human salvation (moksha). Sages (rishis) centred philosophy on the assumption that there is a unitary underlying order in the universe and everything within it. The various schools concentrated on explaining this order and the metaphysical entity at its source (Brahman). The concept of natural law (Dharma) was the basis for understanding how life on earth should be lived.

Schools

Hindu Philosophy

Many Hindu intellectual traditions were classified during the medieval period of Brahmanic-Sanskritic scholasticism into a standard list of six orthodox (astika) schools (darshanas), the "Six Philosophies" all of which accept the testimony of the Vedas.

- Samkhya, the enumeration school
- Yoga, the school of Patanjali (which provisionally asserts the metaphysics of Samkhya)
- Nyaya, the school of logic
- Vaishesika, the atomist school
- Purva Mimamsa (or simply Mimamsa), the tradition of Vedic exegesis, with emphasis on Vedic ritual, and
- Vedanta (also called Uttara Mimamsa), the Upanishadic tradition, with emphasis on Vedic philosophy.

These are often coupled into three groups for both historical and conceptual reasons: Nyaya-Vaishesika, Samkhya-Yoga, and Mimamsa-Vedanta. The Vedanta school is further divided into six sub-schools: Advaita (monism/nondualism), also includes the concept of Ajativada, Visishtadvaita (monism of the qualified whole), Dvaita (dualism), Dvaitadvaita (dualism-nondualism), Suddhadvaita, and Achintya Bheda Abheda schools.

Besides these schools Madhava Vidyaranya also includes the following of the aforementioned theistic philosophies based on the Agamas and Tantras:

- Pasupata, school of Shaivism by Nakulisa
- Saiva, the theistic Sankhya school
- Pratyabhijña, the cognitive school
- Rasesvara, the mercurial school
- Panini Darsana, the grammarian school (which clarifies the theory of Sphota)

The systems mentioned here are not the only orthodox systems, they are the chief ones, and there are other orthodox schools. These systems, accept the authority of Vedas and are regarded as "orthodox" (astika) schools of Hindu philosophy; besides these, schools that do not accept the authority of the Vedas are categorised by Brahmins as unorthodox (nastika) systems. Chief among the latter category are Buddhism, Jainism and Carvaka.

Carvaka is a materialistic and atheistic school of thought and, is noteworthy as evidence of a materialistic movement within Hinduism.

Jain Philosophy

Jainism came into formal being after Mahavira synthesised philosophies and promulgations of the ancient Sramana philosophy, during the period around 550 BC, in the region

that is present day Bihar in northern India. This period marked an ideological renaissance, in which the Vedic dominance was challenged by various groups like Jainism and Buddhism.

A Jain is a follower of Jinas, spiritual 'victors' (Jina is Sanskrit for 'victor'), human beings who have rediscovered the dharma, become fully liberated and taught the spiritual path for the benefit of beings. Jains follow the teachings of 24 special Jinas who are known as Tirthankars ('ford-builders'). The 24th and most recent Tirthankar, Lord Mahavira, lived in c.6th century BC, in a period of cultural revolution all over the world. During this period, Socrates was born in Greece, Zoroaster in Iran, Lao-Tse and Confucious in China and Mahavira and Buddha in India. The 23rd Thirthankar of Jains, Lord Parsvanatha is recognised now as a historical person, lived during 872 to 772 BC... Jaina tradition is unanimous in making Rishabha, as the First Tirthankar.

Jainism is not considered as a part of the Vedic Religion (Hinduism), even as there is constitutional ambiguity over its status. Jain tirthankars find exclusive mention in the Vedas and the Hindu Epics. During the Vedantic age, India had two broad philosophical streams of thought: The Shramana philosophical schools, represented by Buddhism, Jainism, and the long defunct and Ajivika on one hand, and the Brahmana/Vedantic/ Puranic schools represented by Vedanta, Vaishnava and other movements on the other. Both streams are known to have mutually influenced each other.

The Hindu scholar Lokmanya Tilak credited Jainism with influencing Hinduism in the area of the cessation of animal sacrifice in Vedic rituals. Bal Gangadhar Tilak has described Jainism as the originator of Ahimsa and wrote in a letter printed in Bombay Samachar, Mumbai: 10 Dec 1904: "In ancient times, innumerable animals were butchered in sacrifices. Evidence in support of this is found in various poetic compositions such as the Meghaduta. But the credit for the disappearance of this terrible massacre from the Brahminical religion goes to Jainism." Swami Vivekananda also credited Jainism as one of the influencing forces behind Indian culture.

Buddhist Philosophy

Buddhist philosophy is a system of thought which started with the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, or "awakened one". From its inception, Buddhism has had a strong philosophical component. Buddhism is founded on elements of the shramana movement which flowered around 500 BCE, and has had a very strong influence on Hinduism. The Buddha criticised all concepts of metaphysical being and nonbeing as misleading views caused by reification, and this critique is inextricable from the founding of Buddhism.

Buddhism shares many philosophical views with other Indian systems, such as belief in karma, a cause-and-effect relationship between all that has been done and all that will be done. Events that occur are held to be the direct result of previous events. A major departure from Hindu and Jain philosophy is the Buddhist rejection of a permanent, self-existent soul (atman) in favour of anatta (non-Self) and anicca (impermanence).

Jain thinkers rejected this view, opining that if no continuing soul could be accepted then even the effort to attain any worldly objective would be useless, as the individual acting and the one receiving the consequences would be different. Therefore, the conviction in individuals that the doer is also the reaper of consequences establishes the existence of a continuing soul.

Carvaka Philosophy

Carvaka or Lokayata was a philosophy of scepticism and materialism, founded in the Mauryan period. They were extremely critical of other schools of philosophy of the time. Carvaka deemed Vedas to be tainted by the three faults of untruth, self-contradiction, and tautology. And in contrast to Buddhists and Jains, they mocked the concept of liberation, reincarnation and accumulation of merit or demerit through the performance of certain actions. They believed that, the viewpoint of relinquishing pleasure to avoid pain was the "reasoning of fools". Carvaka thought consciousness was an emanation from the body and it ended with the destruction of the body. They used quotes from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad to support this claim. Carvaka denied inference as a means of knowledge and held sensory indulgence as the final objective of life.

Modern Philosophy

Modern Indian philosophy was developed during British occupation (1750-1947). The philosophers in this era gave contemporary meaning to traditional philosophy. Some of them were Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Kireet Joshi, Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayan, M. N. Roy, Subhas Chandra Bose, Indra Sen, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Pandurang Shastri Athavale, U. G. Krishnamurti, Acharya Rajneesh (Osho) and Krishnananda are other prominent names in contemporary Indian philosophy.

Political Philosophy

The Arthashastra, attributed to the Mauryan minister Chanakya, is one of the early Indian texts devoted to political philosophy. It is dated to 4th century BCE and discusses ideas of statecraft and economic policy.

The political philosophy most closely associated with India is the one of ahimsa (non-violence) and Satyagraha, popularised by Mahatma Gandhi during the Indian struggle for independence. It was influenced by the Indian Dharmic philosophy, particularly the Buddha, Bhagvata Gita, as well as secular writings of authors such as Leo Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau and John Ruskin. In turn it influenced the later movements for independence and civil rights, especially those led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and to a lesser extent Nelson Mandela.

The ancient educational system was imitated during the Renaissance, and in the 15th and 16th centuries, school physical training began again. Hieronymus Mercurialis, an Italian humanist, wrote "De Arte Gymnastica" by gathering information related to Greek gymnastic culture from old Greek and Roman sources just as in 16th century, when scholars had differentiated Ancient Greek gymnastics into forms pertaining to health, paramilitary training and athletic/competition; in this work, gymnastic practices were again categorized according to various periods and thought systems (Yildiran, 2005)^[10]. Reform pedagogues of the age of enlightenment, philanthropists such as Basedow, Salzmann, GutsMuths etc. laid the scientific foundations of modern physical training during the 18th century and heavily influenced the intellectuals of the next century deeply (Yildiran, 2005)^[10]. The aim of this study is to examine the "Evolution of Physical Training from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment", which is important because the foundations

of current physical training and sport perceptions are based on this concept.

The Study

The aim of this study is, then, to throw sociological light on the extent to which, as well as the manner in which, the everyday 'philosophies' of PE teachers are underpinned by particular ideologies (e.g. 'health' and 'sports performance'); ideologies that are, in turn, a reflection of wider ideological, economic and cultural forces. Thus, the central object of the study is an attempt to identify and examine PE teachers' 'philosophies' in order to locate these within the broader social context in which PE teachers find themselves.

The Nature and Values of Physical Education

There has always been an air of suspicion about those who think philosophically about the nature and values of physical education. On the one hand, physical education teachers are apt to claim that theirs is essentially a practical vocation; a calling to the teaching of physical activities that can help students to live better lives. What need have they of a philosophy? On the other hand, philosophers of education, notably in the liberal-analytical tradition, have often sought to cast a dim light on physical education, thinking it valuable (on good days at least) but not educationally so. I shall try in this chapter to say something about the nature and values of physical education; the knowledge and the values that are inherent within its activities and those external ones which can be gained from them. The chapter revolves around a critique of some recent theoretically sophisticated attempts to discuss the nature and educational status of physical education by three philosophers David Carr (1997)^[11], Jim Parry (1998)^[12] and Andrew Reid (1996, 1997)^[13, 14]. I try to show where their arguments are both helpful but ultimately inadequate for the task of illuminating what physical education ought properly to consist of and how it might better prove its educational status and value. In particular, I try to show how it is absolutely necessary to think philosophically about the nature and values of activities that are thought to constitute physical education.

On Analytical Philosophy of Education and Physical Education

Before embarking on an account of the nature of physical education, and its knowledge and values claims, it is necessary to first take a short detour and second, offer an apology. First, it is necessary – if we are to have a reflective view of the philosophical terrain in which sense can be made of the concept of physical education – to understand a little of the nature of philosophical thinking. Second, the account here is itself situated within a particular tradition of thought. That same worthwhile knowledge was continuous with the various forms of knowledge that Hirst had delineated by his own set of epistemological criteria. The Petersian thesis was summarised thus: education' implies the transmission of what is worth-while to those who become committed to it; education' must involve knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective, which are not inert; and 'education' at least rules out some procedures of transmission, on the grounds that they lack witlessness and voluntariness on the part of the learner. (Peters, 1966: 45)^[15].

The first two conditions have been referred to as the axiological and epistemological conditions by two other philosophers, Andrew Reid (1996, 1997)^[13, 14] and David Carr (1997)^[11], both of whom have sought to conceptualise

physical education in similar ways, but who have come to rather different conclusions about its educational potential. The third criterion refers to the processes by which such transmission was ethically acceptable. I will comment on the analytical and epistemological dimension of Carr's and Reid's articles and then examine the axiological dimension of Reid's work which is the bedrock of his justification for the educational status of physical education.

Axiology and Physical Education

What Reid attempts, more generously than other liberal philosophers of education, is to connect the ways in which different kinds of knowledge in physical education activities embody different kinds of value. He sets out a fuller list of the sources of value and attempts to relate physical education to them. In addition to arguments about the value of theoretical knowledge, he articulates the following range: intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, economic, hedonic and health. As we have seen, anyone attempting to argue for the educational value of physical education on the grounds that the playing of games conferred a wide-ranging cognitive perspective on the world would be barking up the wrong tree. The point remains, however, that despite these benefits, the value-arguments for physical education ought not to be erected on exactly the same grounds as other curriculum subjects that are palpably different in nature. This inspires Reid's search for a broader range of values.

Conclusion

Arguably, the data from the extensive literature and investigative surveys provide a distorted picture of school physical education in India. Without doubt, there are examples of positively implemented programmes and good practices in physical education in most, if not all, countries across the region. Furthermore, there is an array of individual and institutional endeavours to optimise the quality of physical education delivery and so enhance the experiences of children in schools. Equally there is evidence to generate continuing disquiet about the situation. It is clear that in too many schools in too many countries children are being denied the opportunities to experience quality physical education provision. The health and fitness benefits from being physical active are not as marked as observed with adults, but are favourable nonetheless. The current level of physical activity experienced by many children is, however, cause for concern and shows no signs of improving. Encouraging our school children to become more physically active, will promote potential health benefits during childhood, and may facilitate a positive attitude towards physical activity which will be sustained throughout adult life.

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