Sports cash awards help pump up rural economy

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Saurabh Duggal

Incredible it may sound but it is true! During the last four years, sportspersons from Haryana got, hold your breath, a whooping Rs 150 crore in cash awards for winning medals in various national and international competitions under the state’s sports policy. With ninety per cent of our cash awardees coming from the rural areas, the maximum of the Rs 150 crore they got in cash awards for winning medals in various competitions, has gone to the villages and helped in giving the rural economy a big push.

Hailing from the rural areas and still preferring villages over the humdrum of city life, the maximum of Rs 150 crore, given in cash awards by the Haryana Government, has gone to the villages and contributed in a big way to lifting the rural economy:

In the last one year only, Haryana sportspersons have walked away with Rs 90 crore in cash awards from the state government. Out of this, a sum of Rs 27.60 crore was distributed in the last two months (April-May, 2016) to the medals winners in various national championships, including school nationals and all-India inter-university meets held in 2013-14 and 2014-15.

The Balali village in Bhiwani district which houses famous Phogat wrestling sisters saw about Rs 3 crore coming through Geeta, Babita, Vinesh, Ritu, Priyanka and Sangeeta in the last one year. Besides, the Phogat sisters had also got Rs 1.17 crore for competing for their respective franchises in the inaugural edition of the Pro Wrestling League held last December.

“Apart from serving as a source of motivation for other village girls to join sports to secure for themselves name, fame and money, these wrestling sisters have also contributed a lot to the village’s economy in a big way. After their success in the 2010 Commonwealth Games, they constructed a wrestling hall and extended their house, which gave work opportunity to masons and other construction workers in our and the nearby villages,” said Amit Kumar, sarpanch of Balali Village.

In April, Sonepat district got Rs 3.5 crore out of which about Rs 3 crore was given to the players from the rural areas. The girls from Majri village in the district got Rs 46 lakh for winning national medals in basketball and netball.

“The common strand that runs through the entire state is that the maximum number of our national and international medal winners hail from villages. Take Sonepat district for instance. More than 80 per cent of our cash awardees come from the rural areas. The villages of Majri and Ratangarh which are across the road are hubs of women basketball and netball players. Girls from both villages got more than Rs 50 lakh for winning medals in various national championships,” Mr P S Hooda, District Sports Officer, Sonepat, told Haryana Review.

The handball players from the villages in Narvana tehsil of Jind district got Rs 1.32 crore for winning national medals during the last two years.

“In the last decade, sports has come to be prevalent in Haryana’s villages as a big opportunity for landing government jobs. The rural areas where land holding is less and there are no big industries in the nearby areas, the youths are looking towards government jobs for a better living, and they are realising this dream through sports quota. This explains how in Bhiwani, at least one thousand village youths got government jobs, including in the police and paramilitary forces, over the years,” said SS Nandal, former deputy director, Haryana Sports Department.

“Now, in addition to jobs, the players are also getting hefty cash awards for the national and international medals which has brought about a vertical growth in their living standards,” added Nandal.

In the last one year, the hockey girls from Shahbad in Kurukshetra District got about Rs 3 crore in cash awards. “Shahibad is a very small town and the maximum number of girls, who play hockey, come from very humble background. They are either from the nearby small localities or from the villages. Because of these cash awards, they are able to uplift the living standards of their families,” said Indian team ace forward Rani Rampal.

PRO LEAGUES

In the inaugural edition of the Pro Wrestling League held in December last year, Rs 11 crore was given to the wrestlers representing six franchisee teams. Out of this, wrestlers from Haryana got about Rs 5 crore and, being a rural sport, all wrestlers come from the villages.

In the fourth season of the Pro Kabaddi League which started on June 25, about 100 players representing eight franchises got Rs 12.82 crore. Half of the players are from Haryana and all come from the rural areas.

Pai village in Kaithal, Rindhanara and Kathural villages in Sonepat district are the main gainers from the Pro Kabaddi League.

DANGAL, A TRADITION WRESTLING

Wrestling is part of culture and tradition in the rural areas of Haryana. Dangal is a traditional Indian wrestling competition on mud pits, organised in the villages, help the wrestlers in making their living.

In March, the Haryana Government organised the country’s biggest-ever prize money dangal with Rs 2.1 crore as total prize money. Out of this, wrestlers from the villages got about Rs 2 crore.

“Cash awards are provider of substantial disposable income to the players in the rural setting in Haryana, which trigger the rural economy. The money involved in the sports can also be seen as a source of motivation for the youth,” said Anwini Kumar Nanda, Professor, with the Center for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh.

This article is the result of ground reportage done under the aegis of the Inclusive Media UNDP Fellowship-2015 to study sports as a vehicle of empowerment in rural Haryana.

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