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DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

Gender is the term used to describe the socially constructed characteristics of male and female. These include behavior, roles, and social normal associated with the same man, boy, woman, or girl in a society, in the public, in private, as well as in relationships with each other. This paper aims to explain the difficulties and issues faced by women while trying to get equality and fight for their rights in this patriarchal society. The paper describes their struggles and problems faced in the field of sports and enlightens the steps and initiatives taken to make sports more inclusive.

BRIEF HISTORY AND OVERVIEW

Women is considered as the weak and fragile gender of the society. It is assumed so because of various reasons such as stereotype, cultural practices, the roles assigned to the specific gender, etc. we live in a patriarchal society where it is believed that men are the bread earners whereas women are the house-makers automatically since birth. This Gender-specific discrimination has serious consequences on the health, education, safety and income of women and children. In spite of a number of promises made by the state, treaties and the laws which intended to bring equal rights, we are yet to achieve the equality amongst men and women as females still experience discrimination and violence. Around 9 out of 10 males prefer to say that men have more outgoing-prominent roles than women. That a wife should always obey the husband.¹ Indian women are still seen as the role players of giving childbirth and taking care of the home. This stereotype not only affects how a woman is looked upon, but the discrimination also manifests itself into the lack of backup and support structure for women and girls to show potential in various fields, inclusive of sport.²

In every society, there is a noticeable disparity between the involvement of boys and men versus girls and women in sports, with males predominantly dominating the field. This phenomenon stems from societal

¹ Jonathan Evans, Neha Sahgal, 'Research on How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society' available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/03/02/how-indians-view-gender-roles-in-families-and-society/>

² Neelam (2017)

perceptions of sports being inherently tied to gender roles. Specifically, males are expected to embody traits and behaviors considered masculine, while females are confined to expectations of femininity. Traditionally, women have been pressured to maintain a delicate appearance, adopt passive and nurturing roles, and adhere to specific gender norms. These expectations often discourage women from engaging in activities such as lifting weights, sweating, expressing aggression, and actively participating in sports. The societal emphasis on femininity can lead to adverse consequences, including physical issues that may impact fertility, thus limiting women's involvement in sports. The prevailing social constructs of masculinity and femininity, as well as culturally accepted expressions of gender identity, significantly influence access, participation levels, and the benefits individuals derive from sports in a given socio-cultural context.³

The issue of male superiority is evident in the existing double standards, where the coaching landscape for female teams is witnessing an increasing presence of male coaches, while female coaches are seldom seen leading male teams. This phenomenon reflects a widely held belief that men are inherently suited to coach women, yet it is considered implausible for a woman to attempt coaching a men's team.⁴

The assumption underlying this disparity is rooted in the historical classification of sports as a male domain, coupled with the prevailing notion that men are inherently more capable and, therefore, better equipped for leadership roles in women's sports. However, complexity is much more on play rather than just the presumption of masculine dominance. A counter-belief exists in the society that women have the absence of the requisite skills and, consequently, they are deemed unqualified for positions of authority in sports. This underlying bias contributes to the perpetuation of gender imbalances in coaching positions within the sports domain.

The National Commission for Youth's 2004⁵ report extensively delves into the history of women's involvement in sports in India, tracing developments both beforehand and afterwards 1947. That the inaugural participation of Indian national Women athletes and sports players in the international Olympics competition occurred in the year 1952. In a significant move in the year 1975, the Indian Government had established the Nationwide Sporting Festival for females with the aim of promoting sports participation in females. This festival is holds games and matches for competing at places near and approachable by people, like at local and village levels. Nevertheless, the surveys records that the festivals have diminished at the level of a minimal issuance of certificates, and succeeding election of a player to represent at a national level is conducted on ad-hoc basis i.e. unprepared. The national reports likewise highlights the question of a high exiting rate among young women from universities. It observes that sporting, in general, remain an elite activity in the country. Despite the government's adoption of a sports policy in 1984, the report expresses skepticism about its potential to bring about significant change in the overall scenario.

⁶Dr. Bhalerao Conducted an Indian Study on the issue of Gender Discrimination in the field of sports on 2003.

³ Hannan C (2006)

⁴ Fishwick, (1986)

⁵ The National Commission for Youth, (Volume I), Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affaires and Sports (2004)

⁶ Bhalerao (2003)

The research analyzed the problems faced by female players in participating in interuniversity sports competitions. The athletes chosen for the survey study belonged to multiple colleges in Maharashtra, namely Amravati, Nagpur, Aurangabad and Pune colleges. Dr. Bhalerao employed three data collection methods, namely a questionnaire, interviews, and observations. This research studies the problems faced by young youthful athletes at university level. The initial section of the questionnaire focuses on gathering factual information about the player, covering aspects such as family background, financial status, playing experience, and education. The subsequent section addresses challenges encountered by female players, categorized into nine groups. These groups include:

1. Household
2. Communal
3. Mental
4. Physical
5. Sporting gear and amenities
6. Monetary issues
7. Issues due to engrossment of the administration
8. Issues related to physical education and coaching
9. Problems stemming from selection committees

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY FEMALE ATHLETES:

- 1. Funding Discrepancy:** Female athletes encounter unequal financial support compared to their male counterparts, creating difficulties in maintaining consistent programs and competitions, training facilities, coaching and resources. They also have lesser number of sponsorships and endorsement programs. As an example, have you yourself ever seen the female cricket team in the ads and promotions? Now compare it to the men's cricket team's sponsorships.
- 2. Gender pay gap-** To add up to more various additional trials met by women, the gender pay gap emerges as a particularly prominent issue. The Gender Gap Index in 2020 revealed that India has fallen to one hundredth and twelfth situation, down from the previous position of one hundredth and twelfth in the year 2018.⁷ The women are lesser paid as compared to the men, for the same sport and the same number of efforts and practice taken by both the genders. The Cash Prize Gap between the gender further contributes to the growing discrimination amongst the genders against female athletes. The variation in prize money across various sports is illustrated in the provided image. Despite a 2017 survey conducted for Women Sports Week indicating that around 83% of sporting competitions are rewarding male and female athletes and players correspondingly, disparities persist notably in cricket, football, and golf.⁸

⁷ Neetu Chandra Sharma, India slips four ranks on World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index available at <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-slips-four-ranks-on-world-economic-foru-m-s-global-gender-gap-index-2020-11576574974188.html>

⁸ Anna Thompson and Aimee Lewis, Men get more prize money than women in 30% of sports, available at <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/29744400>

3. **Ongoing Gender Bias:** Daily experiences with pervasive gender bias, whether in professional settings or at home, impose additional burdens on female athletes who undergo scrutiny based on their clothing and speech. Despite ongoing efforts to promote social rights, women in sports, especially within the industry, still struggle with a lack of respect and acknowledgment compared to male athletes.
4. **Restricted Access and Increased Expenses:** The lack of comprehensive physical education in schools and limited opportunities for girls to engage in sports necessitate seeking alternative options, often incurring higher financial costs.
5. **Safety and Transportation Hurdles:** Issues of accessibility, coupled with safety concerns, compel many girls to travel long distances to sports facilities, creating barriers to their participation in sports.
6. **Biasness in awards-** In India, sports awards are categorized into four groups: the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award, the Arjuna Awards, the Dhyan Chand Awards, and Dronacharya Awards. The highest sports honor, Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award, is bestowed upon athletes such as Sakshi Malik, P.V. Sindhu, as well as Dipa Karmakar for their outstanding performances in the Rio Olympics. However, an examination of sports awards in India reveals a substantial gender gap, with women significantly trailing behind men in receiving government-conferred sports honors. The government allocates a limited number of awards each year, typically based on recommendations from sports federations. The issue lies in the fact that these federations are predominantly male-dominated, which may contribute into the under depiction of female in the accolades. One more contributing aspect the disparity in sporting honors for females is the lower partaking in a few specific sports. While women's partaking in sports hovers around 40%, it significantly drops to 10% in sports such as boxing and wrestling.⁹ This lower participation rate in specific sports may result in fewer women being recognized and honored with sports awards.
7. **Social Attitudes and Stigma:** any kind of Discrimination amongst people which is grounded on orientation of a person, sexually and gender distinctiveness persists for female athletes, resulting in bullying, social isolation, and the fear of societal judgments during adolescence.
8. **Impaired Training Quality:** Disparities in facilities, playing times, and coaching availability impede the quality of training for female athletes, affecting their enjoyment and progress in sports. The funding cut for the training and development of men and women differs so drastically that it brings a huge difference amongst its quality.

⁹ Dipti Jain, Sachin P. Mampatta, India's Sports awards have a palpable gender bias available at

<https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/gFXCC5dLy0yT3ZsRRVwxUK/Indias-sports-awards-have-a-palpablegender-bias.html>

- 9. Lack of efficiency of the Institutions/ Bodies set up-** Inefficiency is observed in the functioning of the established institutions and bodies that were intended to assist and oversee athletes in a professional and secure manner. Despite their purpose, these organizations sometimes fail to fulfil their roles. To illustrate, the Sports Authority of India has only documented two incidents where trainers faced arrest on the accusation of harassment and sexual assault, resulting in minimal convictions, often as short as 3 day period.¹⁰ The Sports Law & Welfare Association of India (SLAWIN) has established provisions to address the molestation in games but there has been no report related to these incidents. Additionally, the National Sports Policy, managed by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, allows for the on-line mode of submission of complaints but lacks transparency regarding the number of complaints related to sexual harassment, as well as the outcomes of adjudication in such cases.
- 10. Lack of Positive Role Models:** The prevalence of beauty-centric images overshadows the importance of strong female athletic role models, potentially contributing to peer pressure and dropout rates among girls in sports.
- 11. Inadequate Media Coverage:** Women's sports often receive insufficient representation in the media, making it challenging for female athletes to garner recognition and secure sponsorship opportunities. Every sports fan will know every member of the cricket's team by heart, by only a few female cricketers will be known since only few matches will be covered in the headlines.
- 12. Pregnancy and Maternity Challenges:** Balancing motherhood with sports careers presents significant challenges for female athletes, impacting their training routines and competitive opportunities. The menstruation cycle, once a month, also causes issues in training and exercises.
- 13. Lack of women in leadership roles:** There are lesser women as compared to men in the leadership roles. Sports stands out as one of the most prominent and influential social institutions globally. Notably, individuals who wield influence and visibility in the realm of sports, such as coaches, play a crucial role in determining what and who is deemed significant and valued. Across the world, the majority of coaches are predominantly men¹¹, reinforcing a pattern where men dictate the narrative and set the standards. In sports federations, women appointed to address the escalating concerns of sexual assaults in Indian sports often find themselves relegated to a role that is primarily perceived as a security measure for the protection of female athletes, lacking broader recognition for their coaching capabilities. In the Western context, Title IX of the U.S., it has faced criticism for inadvertently leading to a consistent decline in the number of female coaches from 1972 to 2014. Although Title IX sought to

¹⁰ Ram Kumar, Sports Authority of India coach apprehended on charges of sexual assault, available at <https://www.sportskeeda.com/athletics/sports-authority-india-coach-apprehended-charges-sexual-assault>

¹¹Book by Nicole M. LaVoi

establish payment uniformity for team coaches of women's-team, the allure of higher earnings has tended to entice male trainers, resulting in a gradual displacement of female coaches.

14. Sexual Harassment- One of the primary reasons contributing to the diminishing respect for female athletes across various countries is the prevalent perception of them as objects, susceptible to being used at will. This perception often translates into instances of sexual harassment, encompassing behaviors such as unwarranted requests for sexual favors, which detrimentally impact an individual's sports performance. Many female athletes choose to discontinue their involvement in sports due to the pervasive nature of harassment and abuse. Even families who are overly protective become apprehensive, potentially dissuading their children from pursuing a career in sports. The underreporting of incidents adds another layer to the issue.

Recognizing existing differences and fostering a determination to strive for equal opportunities are crucial steps toward progress. As with many aspects of life, initiating change begins with collective effort, which starts from the efforts of a single person itself.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLES/ INCIDENTS

There are many real-life incidents which can be quoted to give a fair and honest picture of various encounters of issues by female in the profession of sports as well as athletics. Some of them are-

- **Media's role** -A critical role has been played by mass media in exacerbating the gender differences, as illustrated by various instances. For instance, Sania Mirza faced criticism from Muslim organizations for wearing women's tennis attire, deemed inappropriate in Islam.¹² Sportswoman-turned-politician Jyotirmoyee Sikdar highlighted the prevalent issue where a successful female player's husband often becomes the coach, receiving the Dronacharya award.¹³
- **Discrimination from coach**-Prominent sports personalities in the country have encountered discrimination from the government, the trainers, or even their own blood relations. The memorable incident in the year 2009 is where when India's prior sprint ruler P.T. Usha openly cried on the television in front of the mass media underscored the biasness and inequality she faced.¹⁴ While the situation has not seen significant improvement, there is a positive trend with accomplished sportswomen like Mary Kom and Saina Nehwal reaching their peaks.

¹² Associated Press, Mirza responds to Muslim criticism of how she dresses, available at <https://www.espn.com/sports/tennis/news/story?id=2227000>

¹³ Supra Note 13 at Page 21

¹⁴ Press Trust of India, P.T. Usha in tears after ill treatment blame game starts, available at <https://www.ndtv.com/sports-news/usha-in-tears-after-ill-treatment-blame-game-starts-402722#:~:text=Usha%2C%20who%20came%20with%20her,SAI%20officials%20for%20their%20apathy.>

- **Gender pay gap-** This disparity is well-documented in numerous studies and reports. Notably, in the 2020 list of highest-paid tennis players, Naomi Osaka and Serena Williams ranked 29th and 33rd, respectively.¹⁵ An illustration of the gender pay gap is evident in cricket, where during the international 20-20 matches, the ICC International Cricket Council financed every men's teams to get a ticket in business class, while only providing economy class flights for the women's teams.¹⁶ In the game of basketball, the National Women's Association for basketball i.e. the WNBA in the U.S. stands out as a lucrative opportunity for female athletes globally. However, even in the WNBA, the approximate average payment/income in the season for the year of 2017 was \$74,759, significantly lower when compared to the most paid league of the men's category, the National Association for Basketball i.e. the NBA, where the average male athlete's income is \$7,147,217 for a season—representing a staggering 96-fold difference.¹⁷
- **Sexual Harassment-** An illustrative incident occurred in 2016 at the Kanteerava Stadium in Bangalore, where obscene messages, bearing the sports authority's signature, were affixed in multiple locations within the restroom, instructing female athletes to engage in masturbation activities before practice.¹⁸ In Bihar, a tragic event unfolded in February 2011 when a kabaddi player, representing India in an event at the international level, lost her life simply because she declined sharing her mobile number with a jawan from the CRPF.¹⁹ Similarly, a young and promising tennis player took her own life after enduring repeated molestation by a DGP. Although the perpetrator received a severe sentence, he was released within five months, citing his exceptional service record, advanced age, and the need to care for his ailing daughter as reasons for leniency.²⁰

¹⁵ Kurt badenhausen, Naomi Osaka is the highest paid female athlete ever, available at

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2020/05/22/naomi-osaka-is-the-highest-paid-female-athlete-ever-topping-serena-williams/?sh=33b03d3e1fd3>

¹⁶ Madeleine Chapman, Men in business class, women in economy: A tale of two T20 World Cups, Available at

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¹⁷ Priyansh, Gender Equality in Sport Is the New Final Frontier for Women, available at <https://thewire.in/gender/gender-pay-gap-sport>

¹⁸ Shameful Messages Inside Bengaluru Stadium Ask Female Athletes To Masturbate Before Practice, visited at:

<https://www.mensxp.com/special-features/today/33950-shameful-messages-inside-bengaluru-stadium-ask-female-athletes-to-masturbate-before-practice.html>

¹⁹ CRPF jawan shoots national level kabaddi player, available at <https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/news/crpf-jawan-shoots-national-level-kabaddi-player-190572>

²⁰ TNN and Agencies, Ruchika molestation case: SC upholds former Haryana DGP Rathore's conviction, but reduces his jail term, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Ruchika-molestation-case-SC-upholds-former-Haryana-DGP-Rathores-conviction-but-reduces-his-jail%20term/articleshow/54476446.cms>

SOCIETY'S ROLE IN INCREASING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS

The role of society in increasing women's participation in sports is crucial, and the following are several sets of proposals what the society can do on their part as these below mentioned key aspects need dire attention:

1. **Female-friendly environment:** Creating a positive initial experience is vital for women's sustained participation in sports. This involves fostering a supportive environment with female companions, teachers, coaches, and ensuring a positive attitude from male coaches, teachers, and administrators.
2. **Career opportunities:** Breaking the perception that sports cannot lead to a successful career for females is essential. Providing equal career opportunities in sports can make parents more supportive, as it can lead to financial independence and contribute to the family's financial support system.
3. **Promotion of successful female athletes:** Recognizing and publicizing the achievements of outstanding athletes like M.C. Mary Kom, Anju Bobby George, Saina Nehwal, Sania Mirza, P.V. Sindhu, Sakshi Malik, Krishna Poonia, and Dipa Karmakar can serve as inspirational role models for other female athletes and their families.
4. **Parental attitudes:** Changing perceptions among parents is crucial. Girls should not be limited to traditional roles, and parents need to understand the evolving social landscape, encouraging their daughters to actively participate in sports on par with their male counterparts. Parental influence is a significant factor in encouraging girls' participation in sports. When girls have parents who were involved in sports during their childhood or who are still active in sports, they are more likely to engage in sports activities themselves. Additionally, parents play a crucial role in advocating for gender equality in sports within educational settings. They can contribute by insisting that schools offer equal facilities and opportunities for both their daughters and sons, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for girls in sports.
5. **Equal opportunities:** Providing women with the same opportunities as men, including access to equipment, resources, and funding, is essential. Recognizing the importance of females in society and affording them equal opportunities is a fundamental step.
6. **Female aggression in the Indian context:** Acknowledging and channeling the hidden aggression in Indian females through sports can be a constructive way to express and manage these emotions.
7. **Understanding limitations:** Trainers and instructors should deliberate the cultural and societal boundaries faced by girls. Having positive expectations and acknowledging that a girl player can excel as much as male player is essential.

8. **Treatment and dealing with women athletes:** Recognizing the emotional sensitivity of female athletes and understanding the cultural barriers they may face is important. A certain quantity of emotions is required to feel empathetic towards the struggles and hardships they face to come and play. Coaches and teachers should provide sympathetic support during training and competitions.

SPORTS CENTRIC INITIATIVES BY THE GOVERNMENT TO UPLIFT WOMAN.

1. ²¹Khelo India Initiative

The Khelo India national programme was introduced for the development of Sports Scheme in 2017. There were 12 components in the Scheme for Khelo India and one of them is “sports for women”. It holds an approach towards awareness regarding health and fitness, for promotion of sports among women. The scheme of khelo India is otherwise gender neutral, but as an initiative to bring gender equality, it holds various competitions to encourage participation of women. It believes in social inclusion, awareness, increased performance at sports at international level. It will be implemented in collaboration with Indian Olympic Association. A committee will be set up to oversee the implementations of the sports for women vertical to decide the extent of financial budgeting and help required by the vertical.

2. ²²Collaboration between Ministry of Women and Sports Ministry

Ms. Smriti Irani, the Union Minister of Women and Child Development and Shri Kiren Rijiju, Former Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, in 2021 joined hands and decided to work together towards upliftment of women and girls all across the country. The initiative took place to grow female gender also in the field of sports, as there has always been inequality towards the opportunity received by the women athletes. They have arranged for an online training programme for female Physical Education Teachers and Coaches, in alliance with the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Andolan as well as the Fit India mission, with the objective to empower the female P.Ed. Teachers so they can also contribute at the primary and secondary level education for keeping and developing the interest of girls in sports. The training provided to the teachers will be free of cost. The online training programme is the beginning of multiple projects planned by both the departments/ministries. They also strategy to organize Female Super League in sports like Basketball, Kho Kho, Football, etc. Ms. Irani has said that they purpose or this initiative is to develop the feeling in our women that they can do anything on which they set their minds.

²¹ Sports development by Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Mission Directorate dated 26.09.2018, available at <https://www.yas.nic.in/sites/default/files/Khelo%20India%20-%20Sports%20For%20Women.pdf>

²² Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports Sports Ministry collaborates with the Ministry of Women and Child Development to empower women through sports and physical fitness, available at <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1703343>

CURRENT SCENARIO

Feminists have actively contested and confronted traditional gender stereotypes related to sports and physical activity. A comparison between the conventional stereotypes of women in sports and those of 21st-century female athletes reveals a significant shift, with women establishing themselves prominently in the athletic biosphere. The capability of women to contest and come out of the chauvinist barricades and prejudices about women's bodily presence, athletic ability of the player, and their participation in sports is evident in as the number of participants have generously increased.

The experiences of many female athletes underscore the necessity of redefining femininity. Despite progress, there remains a lingering disparity in the encouragement girls receive compared to their male counterparts, hindering their social independence and physical activity. The feminist movements of the 1970s played a pivotal role in expanding women's roles across various domains, including traditionally male-dominated areas such as competitive women's bodybuilding. This sport, contradicting traditional notions of femininity, has presented a new image and questioned the stereotypical view of female frailty.

Women bodybuilders, through their display of hardness and strength—attributes traditionally associated exclusively with males—have challenged conventional ideas about the biological differences between genders. The women's active partaking in sporting has debunked from the notion of female frailty as an ideological construct rather than a natural reality. Since the 1970s, there has been a notable and radical increase in the opportunities for girls and women to participate in sports. This surge is not only reflected in the growing numbers of girls engaging in sports but also in the expanding variety of sports available to them. While efforts are being made to create a more balanced sports environment for both genders, achieving equality between women's and men's sports remains a challenge due to significant differences in scenarios and support. Women and girls in athletics are yet to attain parity with their male counterparts in the sports arena. An analysis of the number of participants in Olympic Games provides a basis for comparing the disparities in sports involvement. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, there was a remarkable increase in women's participation in sports, reflecting societal changes that prioritized gender equality. Though the performance and partaking percentage differs across every country and varies in each sport, sports with women's participation, i.e. women's competitions have expanded their acceptance globally, with instances like figure skating surpassing male counterparts in popularity. A research on women sportspersons in different sports like swimming and track and field reported a higher degree of societal alteration amongst themselves.

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The recent surge in female participation in our nation can be credited to multiple features, including the female's movement, the fitness movement, and amplified public consciousness and education about female sports competitions. All of these parameters has changed the definition societal, occupational, and relatives roles for females, granting them a much higher amount of authority and decision making power over their own lives. Additionally, the evolving interpretation of the culture in women in sports has enlarged the embracing of women in sports and women's competitions. At one point of time women's sports were considered unfeminine or stigmatized for engaging in high-level competitions, these sports are now widely

²³ Belaz (1975)

regarded as acceptable.

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