

# Gender Discrimination in Indian sports

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## Abstract

Gender discrimination in the athletics industry has long been a controversial topic- even the founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, said in 1896, "No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks." Since then, gender equality in sports has come a long way, including UNESCO recognizing sports and physical activity as a human right in 1978. Despite the obstacles women face in athletics, many women have led and are leading the way to gender equity. This paper profiles women athletes and administrators who have paved the way, and offers "Strategies for Change" that women and girl athletes, coaches, administrators, and parents can take to make school and college athletics more equitable. Participation in sports benefits women just as it does men, helping to develop leadership skills, boosting self-esteem and grades, and promoting physical fitness and health. Women and girls who participate in sports and fitness programs are healthier and more academically successful. Unsurprisingly, sports, which house the careers of the most passionate and the aspiring, are also a major concern when it comes to the issue of gender discrimination. Male dominance in sports has become a nightmare for female athletes, who in the hope of pursuing their careers in the field of sports, have been deprived of self-esteem among a plethora of gender discrimination instances. This in turn can lead to increased violence against women by these male athletes. We need to create a climate in which sports and fitness are for everyone, not just a few, and in which everyone's abilities are tested and respected.

## Introduction

Sports are one area where gender inequality is highly evident. It is deplorable that even today, women are treated so differently, especially in sports. Women in India are still seen as home-making and child-rearing machines. In some cities, women have also started earning their own living but participation in sports is still gloomy. Major problems are social, psychological, financial and family issues. Sexual harassment by the coaches is nothing new.

The media and the people are also at fault with the "extra-interest" in the personal lives of sports women and creating a controversy about it, for instance, the sports costumes they wear. The finest of sports women in India have faced discrimination at some level in their sports career, be it at the hands of authorities, selection teams, coaches, governments, or even their own families. Remember that moment in 2009 when India's former sprint queen, P.T. Usha broke down in front of the media regarding the discrimination meted out to her?

The situation has not changed much till now, but I think we are headed towards betterment with so many talented sports women in India reaching the peaks. We're all rooting for Mary Kom, Saina Nehwal, amongst many others. All we probably need is need to recognise that differences exist and a will to push towards equal opportunities. Like many things in life, the change begins with us.

Actually, Sport is one area where gender inequality is strongly evident. The problem is more socio-psychological than anything else. Today, as we stand at the start of a new millennium it is deplorable that men and women are treated so differently, especially

in sport. Women make up 50% of the world's population but they are not given equal opportunities. Men are still considered the better sex and this is one of the reasons why the world is yet to produce a female Michael Schumacher, Tiger Woods, Mike Tyson or a Sachin Tendulkar.

Sport in India is yet to reach its peak. The Mughals ruled India for centuries, the Britishers for another one and a half-century. It was only after 1947, when we achieved independence that we started developing as a modern nation, with special rights to half of its citizens namely women. Indian women are still trying to establish their own identity. Women in India are still unable to take a stand for themselves.

As is mentioned above, gender inequality is one of the many issues because of which India is not being able to progress at a faster rate. In India we seem to be deifying our great leaders but never pay attention to what they are trying to tell us. Pandit Nehru has said that to awaken the people, it is the woman who must be awakened, once she is on the move the family moves, the nation moves.

A society, which does not allow a girl to do something simple as primary education, is unlikely to let her participate in sport without any hurdles. Even before taking part in 400meter hurdles the girl has to pass so many more social hurdles. This project is an attempt to analyze the problems that a girl, who wants to shape her life as a sports woman.

Research has suggested that participation in sport can be an invigorating and personally empowering experience for women. Being an athlete, especially a skilled athlete, can change the way a woman see herself. It can make her feel physically stronger, more competent, and more in control of her life as an independent individual. Sport participation also provides girls and women with opportunities to reconnect with the power of their own bodies.

Sport has been a part of the official school program since the mid-1800s, and was originally

Incorporated into the curriculum to serve as an important line of defense against the potential Feminization of American males by a growing female teaching profession. As a part of the Curriculum, sport provided opportunities for physical fitness and competition, as well as a medium through which valued socio-cultural life skills could be learned and practiced. Grounded in ideals of masculinity, sport, more than any other part of the educational curriculum has been, and continues to be, a gender issue.

### **Aim of Study**

This paper will explore how school sport has served to institutionalize a gender specific and gender biased sport value system. First the socio-cultural context, in which school sport emerged, and its history and evolution will be reviewed. Next the

differential impact which school sport has on females and males will be examined.

## **The Institutional and Policy Context**

### **The National Youth Policy**

The New National Youth Policy, 2003, was tabled in parliament in December 2003, in which

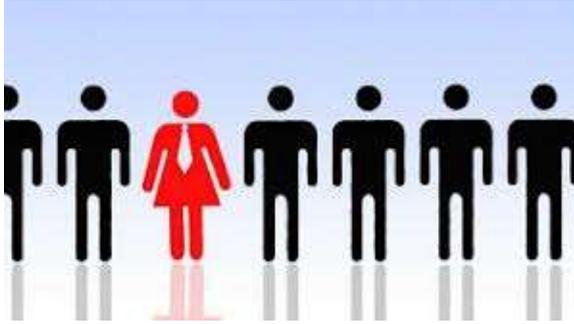
Youth are defined as in the age group of 13 to 35 years; with the object of bringing a large segment of the adolescent population into the age group. The policy recognizes four thrust areas in which Gender Justice. is one of them. Policy includes various key sectors of youth development and "Sports and Recreation" is also present there. National Commission for Youth was setup on 15th March 2002 and has submitted the report on 5th July 2004 based on the terms of reference. It was observed that in the terms of reference .Sports. was totally neglected.

New National Sports Policy, 2001, envisages broad basing of sports, achievement of excellence in international sports events, provisioning of modern sports infrastructure, upgrading skills of our coaching fraternity, more efficient functioning of national sports federations, adequate sport science backup and active involvement of business and industry in promotion of sports. Enhancement of the participation of women in sport is one of the salient features of the policy.

In order to implement the directives of honorable Supreme court of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports constituted a committee to look into the complaints regarding 'Sexual Harassment of women at work place'.

### **Women and Sports**

The recent report of the National Commission for Youth (2004) has traced in detail the participation of women in Sports before and after 1947. The first Indian woman to participate in the Olympics was in 1952. In 1975, the Government of India instituted the National Sports festival for women with a view to promote women's sports. The National festival is preceded by competitions at the local and the district level. However the report has observed that these competitions have been reduced to mere issuing of certificates and the subsequent selection at the national level is done on ad-hoc basis. The National Commission report has also pointed towards the issue of dropout rate of girls from the schools. The report observed, "Sports is by and large an elite activity in the country and the adoption of a sports policy, as the government has done in 1984, is hardly likely to change the situation very much".



## The Sports Authority of India

The Sports Authority of India (SAI) was established by the Government of India on March 16, 1984 with the twin objectives of broad-basing of sports and spotting/nurturing of talented children in different age groups for achieving excellence by providing them with requisite infrastructure, equipment, coaching and other facilities. It has 6 regional centers at Bangalore, Gandhinagar, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Bhopal and Imphal and one sub-center at Guwahati. SAI has also two academic wings, one for training of coaches and research and development in sports at the Netaji Subhash Chandra National Institute of Sports, Patiala and the other for physical education at the Lakshmi Bai National College of Physical Education, Thiruvananthapuram. Under the scheme, National Coaching Scheme, SAI has under its rolls 1510 coaches in different grades against the sanctioned strength of 1623.

## Social & Cultural issues on Sport

There is no doubt violence exists in sports, famous acts of violence in sports include Mike Tyson biting off Evander Holyfield's ear in their rematch, and the brawl which had Ron Artest going into the stands and punching spectators. However, depending on the person, I believe that violence plays somewhat a role in sports. I believe violence can be used as an advantage or an outlet for aggression in sports. but to say violence is a problem in sports is a discrimination. Sports are violent depending on the one you choose. For instance, you can expect more violence in sports like football, hockey, rugby, lacrosse, or boxing, rather than sports like skating, golf, or tennis.

Research in the sociology of sport suggests that sport can be an invigorating and a personally empowering experience for girls and women (Nelson, 1994; Taub and Blinde, 1993; Young and White, 1995). Being an athlete, especially a skilled athlete, can change the way a woman sees herself. It can make her feel physically stronger, more competent, and more in control of her life as an independent individual. This is important because social life often is organized in ways that lead girls and women to see themselves as

weak, dependent and powerless (Cantor and Bernay, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; McDermott, 1996; Young, 1990).

## An Indian Study on Gender issues in Sports

One such study is by Dr Bhalerao in 2003. It is her Ph. D. thesis, which is about gender issues in sport. The title of which is .Analysis of problems faced by women players who participate in interuniversity sport competitions... This thesis analyses the problems specific of girl players in at the university level. There are quite a lot of similarities in the factors that she has analyzed and the factors that we are dealing with in the present study. But there are basic differences in the sample. Dr Bhalerao's sample is limited to inter-university players, hence the girls are basically playing at one level and also they are in the similar age group. In the present study the sample that we have selected is varied in many ways including their age and playing experiences also the games that they are playing. Dr Bhalerao has used three methods of data collection, a questionnaire, interviews and observations. In the first part of the questionnaire she asks about the factual information of the player like information about her family, financial status, playing experience, education etc. In the second part she has divided the problems faced by the girl players in nine groups and asked questions about them. The problems are classified in the following groups,

1. Family
2. Social
3. Psychological
4. Physiological
5. Sport equipment and facilities
6. Financial problems
7. Problems arising because of the government
8. Physical education and coaching related problems
9. Problems developed due to selection committees

The players selected for this study were from four universities in Maharashtra state. They were from Pune, Nagpur, Aurangabad and Amravati universities. All these cities are comparatively developed areas in India and also in Maharashtra.

## Title IX

Passed in 1972, Title IX was a landmark piece of legislations that banned sexual discrimination in all schools, including in athletics. It applies to all state and local agencies that receive education funds, which includes school districts, colleges, universities, libraries and museums. It focuses on giving women equal opportunities in the athletic arena to those of men.

## Benefits of Sports

We asked them whether they thought there were any benefits of playing a sport. All of them answered affirmatively

**Table-1 Benefits of Sports Participation**

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical</li> <li>• Social</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Learn to face tough time”</li> <li>• future opportunities</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better for the country</li> <li>• personality development</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Confidence building</li> <li>• Independence</li> </ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• psychological</li> <li>• fame</li> <li>• discipline</li> <li>• active</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team work</li> <li>• Fitness</li> <li>• Career prospects</li> <li>• “People perceive you differently”</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peace of mind</li> <li>• Benefits studies</li> <li>• Exposure</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Boredom perspective</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all round development</li> <li>• extra credit in exams</li> <li>• reservation in jobs and schools</li> <li>• promotes talent</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Travel</li> <li>• Mind gets relaxed.</li> </ul>                       |

We asked the players for their suggestions about developing women’s sport in India. They made quite a few. These suggestions are about the training and competing part, they are also about developing women’s sport in the country itself and they are also about what they expect from the family and the society in general. We can easily see that the girls have given a lot of thought the subject and issues of women’s sport.

## Strategies for Change

Parents' influence is important. Girls are more likely to participate if they have a parent who participated as a child, or who still plays sports. Also, parents can help by insisting schools provide equal facilities and opportunities to their daughters and sons. Unfortunately, even girls who participate in sports and fitness cite obstacles, girls getting picked for teams after all the boys are picked; gym teachers who assume girls are not as good as boys; and better coaches and equipment for boys' teams. While urban and rural girls participate equally in sports and fitness, rural girls who quit sports, are more likely to have problems with transportation or inadequate funds. In addition, more rural girls than urban girls feel boys make fun of girls who play sports.

- 1: Support Women's and Girls’ Sports
- 2: Join a Women's Rights Organization
- 3: Challenge the Myths
- 4: Speak Out Against Gender Inequity
- 5: Encourage Other Women and Girls
- 6: Push for Gender Equity Policies
- 7: Publicize Discrimination at your School or University
- 8: Spread general awareness

## Conclusion

Historically, girls, women, and femininity have been defined in relation and contrast to men and masculinity. Sports and the sports world have been tied with the masculine domain, and there has been a legacy of bias against the female athlete. In the past few decades, this trend has been confronted and challenged. Girls and women have “tackled” narrow, negative, and limiting concepts and ideas that they should not participate in sports, sweat, show aggression, or compete, and begun to include physical strength and athletic prowess in the definition of femininity. As a result, traditional stereotypes for females have slowly been changing and evolving. This will likely continue once girls and women quit feeling that they need to choose between sports and femininity. While there is still a long way to go, females can obviously break free of traditional stereotypes.

Sports are one area where gender inequality is highly evident. It is deplorable that even today, women are treated so differently, especially in sports. Women in India are still seen as home-making and child-rearing machines. The situation has not changed much till now, but I think we are headed towards betterment with so many talented sports women in India reaching the peaks. We’re all rooting for Mary Kom, Saina Nehwal, amongst many others. All we probably need is need to recognize that differences exist and a will to push towards equal opportunities. Like many things in life, the change begins with us. It may seem as if sports have a lot we can complain about, but the truth to why we play sports is simply beautiful. Sports have changed and helps change

humanity. It teaches us mental toughness, how to overcome challenges, introduces us to team work and how effective it is, responsibility, and keeps us mentally and physically in shape. Sport creates amazing character and teaches true attributes to be a good person.

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