

A Case Study :

Scene and support : Indian women sports

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ABSTRACT

Women's physical education and sports depend largely on the status of women in any society and the importance of physical education and health of women in the society. In India, women are traditionally not encouraged to indulge in sports, with centuries the women has been rated as less important than men in almost all parts of the India. In fact, in some ways women's responsibilities are to look after household and children. This paper deals the specific difficulties facing the development of women sports from the period of Medieval India and, then focused on the effort made for the support and encouragement of Indian women sports.

Key words : Chaugan, Shikar, Hindola, Jauhar, Purdah

Medieval Indian women:

Medieval India was not women's age. It is supposed to be the 'dark age' for them. When foreign conquerors like Muslims invaded India they brought with them their own culture. For them woman was the sole property of her father, brother or husband and she does not have any will of her own. One more reason for the decline in women's status and freedom was that original Indians wanted to shield their women folk from the barbarous Muslim invaders. Some of the outdoor games enjoyed only by the ladies of the upper and the ruling class were *Chaugan*, *Shikar* or hunting, animal fight, *Hindola*, *Jalakrida*, *Chor-machichani*, *Ankh-michayat*, etc. As polygamy was a norm for these invaders, they picked up any woman they wanted and kept her in their "harems". In order to protect them, Indian women started using 'Purdah', (a veil), which covers body. Due to this reason, their freedom also became affected. All these gave rise to some new evils such as child marriage, Sati, Jauhar, restriction on widow marriage, Purdah system and restriction on girl education.

Modern Indian women :

The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. In on one hand she is at the peak of ladder of success, on the other hand she is mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her by her own family members. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. Their path is full of roadblocks. The sex ratio of India shows that the Indian society is still prejudiced against female. There are 933 females per thousand males in

India according to the census of 2001, which is much below the world average of 990 females. There are many problems which women in India have to go through daily. These problems have become the part and parcel of life of Indian women and some of them have accepted them as their fate. Like malnutrition, poor health, maternal mortality, lack of education, mistreatment, overworked, lack of power, marriage, dowry, female infanticide foeticide and recreational activities.

Indian women in sports :

The main problem lies with the lack of sports culture in the country. In our educational curricula, more emphasis is on academics and sports remain the most neglected area. Parents also do not like to encourage their children to take up sports seriously as it does not offer any career opportunities.

News channels, newspapers and advertisements depict our societal attitude and it clearly shows that sports are still considered to be a male domain. As even today, while buying toys for children, parents automatically go for buying dolls, indoor games and kitchen playing sets for their daughters, but cricket bats and footballs for their sons. Girls are encouraged to learn virtues of a good homemaker since their childhood, whereas boys are encouraged to play outdoor sports. We hardly even see a girls' sports team or uni-sex sports team in co-educational schools. The upbringing of boys is such that they are not able to digest girls as opponents or team members. On top of it, glitters over gold are Indian movies and the Indian Premier League matches, which have reduced status of girls in the sports to mere cheer leaders and spectators,

whose heart stops beating on the glimpse of a cricketer. Lack of sports ground and sponsors for sportswomen are acting as a hindrance in promoting sports among women, especially in suburbs and rural areas. It is obvious for parents to feel worried for their girl children in such a society.

According to Pandey and Krishnaswamy (1997) the women in Indian sports have struggled to carve a niche for themselves. There has been a difficult balancing act: for at one hand is a society, which by definition has assigned a role for them, and that role does not include sport. If some women have been able to continue with sport even after marriage and childbirth, it is largely because of their husband's encouraging attitude or because the spouse himself has been a sportsperson. Indian sport has number of such cases:

Reeth Abraham (husband Sunil was a sprinter, who represented India at the 1982 Asian Games); Shiny Wilson (husband Wilson Cherian, is a former international and national record holder in swimming); Rachita Mistry (husband, Homiyar, was a former state level athlete); Women's weightlifter Bharti Singh (husband played hockey for India); Badminton star Madhumita Bisht (husband Vikram Singh played for India and is now a coach). Men and women players getting married to each other has helped the women to continue with sport. It is not uncommon to see two chess players get married (Pravin and Bhagyashree Thipsay or Anupama Gokhale and Raghunandan Gokhale); or in table tennis (Kamlesh and Monalisa; Sujay Ghorpade and Ritu Bhola and many years before them Farokh Khodaiji and Kaity Chargeman); in hockey (Surjit Singh and Chanchal Randhawa); and athletics (Neelam J Singh and Jaswant Singh).

But at the same time, there have been women who bid sport good-bye once they got married. They could probably have continued, but they chose otherwise. Family responsibilities meant they themselves assumed the role of the homekeeper, while the husband went out. Women like Ashwini Nachappa and Vandana Rao certainly had a few more years of athletics in them (Shekhar, 2005).

All this, directly or indirectly, sings the same song that women are the weaker sex psychologically, physically, are docile and lack aggression, which are prerequisites for being a sports person. But then, encouraging sports among girls are the answer to make girls stronger. How can one forget that scene in "Chak De India", when the girls' hockey players, taught an eve teaser a good lesson? They were able to do so because of their physical stamina only.

The time has come to change social attitude towards

women and practice gender equity. Here, the media needs to play a central role. The manner in which women are portrayed in the media influences our mindsets and attitudes. There is a need to transform the portrayal of women in advertisements. Women should be portrayed for sports, not anti-sports. There is dire need for making more films like, "Chak De India", highlighting the women sports players for their games, rather than their good looks and sexy figures.

Despite female participation in sports still being considered taboo in some sections of our society, over the years there have been several of our leading ladies who have achieved greatness at the international level. These women have dealt with disinterest from the government and, in many cases, gender bias to achieve their dreams, and in a way brought about a culture change as more and more women are taking up sports.

Some of our most decorated women:

Athletics:

P.T.Usha – India's first female sporting icon, Queen of Indian Track and Field. First Indian woman and fifth Indian to qualify for the final of Olympic individual events in Los Angeles 1989 Olympic and got 4th position loose by 1/100th seconds.

Anju Bobby George – Long Jump, Bronze Medalist in 2003 World Championship at Paris, 1st Indian to win a medal in world championship, Silver medal in IAAF world Athletic final in 2005.

Kamaljit Sandhu- She became the first Indian woman to win Gold in the Asian Games in 1970.

Shiny Wilson dominated the 800m vent in Asia; has seven consecutive gold medals in 800m in SAFF Games.

Sunita Rani, Jyotimayee Sikdar, Ashwini Nachappa, Kamaljeet Sandhu, Roja Kutty, Vandana Rao etc.

Badminton:

Saina Nehwal – At the age of 19, she is ranked 6 in the Badminton World Federation. Won super series tournament in 2009.

Aparna Popat- finished runners-up in World junior badminton championship in Denmark (1996).

Ameeta Kulkarni, Radhika Bose

Boxing:

Marykom Champion in four successive world championships, she even won the world champion, a year after having given birth to twins.

Chess:

Koneru Hampy- Youngest grand master in chess

history (and that not just for women's chess). 15 years 1 month 27 days former junior world champion become only the second female chess player to cross the 2600 ELO marking in Oct. 2007. According to FIDE Jan. 2009 ranking, she is world No. 2

Cricket:

Mithali Raj – Led India to the final of the previous world cup four years ago.

Jhulan Goswami – World record holder for the highest score in the women's cricket, now captain of India team.

Mountaineering:

Indian women have conquered Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world. Bachendri Pal, Santosh Yadav and Harshwanti Bisht are women mountaineers of great repute.

Squash:

Joshna Chinappa – 1st Indian girl to win the British Squash Championship 2003, runner up at Belgium 2005 World Junior Championship and was made the first beneficiary of the Rs. 40 Crore "Mittal Champion Trust" foundation of Laxmi Mittal aimed at helping promising Indian sports persons financially.

Swimming:

The most popular and graceful of all sports, swimming has also produced its Indian stars. The unchallenged Indian queen of this sport was Dolly Nazir of Mumbai, who had won every major swimming title in India. Miss Nasir, not content with short distance swimming, performed the Marathon feat of swimming from a long distance in the Arabian Sea to the Gateway of India in Mumbai. Aarti Saha became the first Indian woman to cross the English Channel (1959). Later, Anita Sood became the fastest Asian swimmer to cross the channel. There have since been great achievements by Bula Chaudhury, Abhinaya Shetty, Aarti Pradhan, M. Usha and others in international competitions and long distance swimming.

Table tennis:

Sayeeda Sultana - She defeated the world champion Angelica Razeamu in World Championship in Vienna.

Table tennis star Indu Puri won World Railways title in 1978. She also defeated the then world champion Park Yung Sun of North Korea in 1978 Asian Championships at Kuala Lumpur.

India's table tennis strength had since been reinforced by players like Meena Parande, Rachel John and Miss

Nasikwala, who won the Triple Crown in the first Asian Championship in Singapore in 1952. The former world champion Victor Barna had been training promising players under the Raj Kumari Coaching Scheme. Recently, Monalisa Barua, Niyati Shah and others have made a name in the field.

Tennis:

Sania Mirza – Can be considered India's 1st female sporting celebrity. Sania burst on to the world stage when she reached the 3rd round of the Australian open in 2005. She became 1st Indian women to win a WTA tournament, when she won at the Hyderabad open in front of her home town fans.

Aparna Popat, Jhanavi Parekh, Laxmi, Uzmakhan

Weight lifting:

Karnam Malleshwari – She is the only women to have won an Olympic medal at Sydney in 2000. She also once held the record for the 69Kg. categories in the clean and jerk/ which she made during her 1994 World championship triumph.

Kunju Rani - She brought maximum medals for India from World Championships, 17 silvers, 1 bronze.

Marathon:

Asha Aggarwal is the first Indian woman to win marathon title in Asian Championships (1985).

"This success showcases women's empowerment. The team's sterling performance augurs well for the resurgence of our national sport at the international level," the Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh said in a statement when the women's hockey team won the Champions Challenge II tournament at Kazan in Russia 2009.

Efforts made by the Government to encourage Indian women sports :

Efforts are being made at the National and state level to encourage women's participation in sports in India. Some of the Govt. efforts are:

- The National Plan of Physical Education and Recreation, evolved by the Ministry of Education, gives much importance to physical education and recreation in educational institutions for girls and boys.

- The Rajkumari sports coaching scheme was initiated in 1953 and after eight years was merged with the National Coaching Scheme of the National Institute of Sports at Patiala.

- The Union Education Ministry has placed at the disposal of Netaji Subhash National Institute of Sports, funds for the implementation of special programmes to

cover as large number of women as possible in the ambit of sports.

– The first highlight of the programme was the organization of the National Women's Sports Festival every year since 1975 onwards.

– Organizing the 9th Asian Games in India was beneficial for sports consciousness among Indians, especially women.

– There have been special talent hunt schemes backed by scientific coaching and training schedules which have produced world class sports women like Anusaya Bai, Geeta Zutsi, Valsamma, Vandana Rao, Bhuwaneshwari, Usha Agrawal, Bula Chaudhary, Ami Ghia, Madhumita Singh, Indu Puri, and Anita Sood.

– A Separate Department for Sports was created by the Govt. of India in 1982 and the first National Sports Policy was announced in 1984.

– The Sports Authority of India (SAI) was established by the Govt. of India, on 25th January 1984. Registered as a Society is a successive organization of the Special Organizing Committee, IX Asian Games-1982, originally given the task of maintenance and management of stadium built for Asiad-1982. Later on, with amalgamation of the Society for National Institute of Physical Education and Sports (SNIPES) on 1st May 1987, SAI broadened its activities with an overall objective of improving the sports facilities and performance of Indian sports persons

– The Sports Authority of India is actively engaged in implementing schemes to promote sports awareness and physical fitness.

– National sports festival for women scheme, launched in 1995, is being implemented in collaboration with the State and UT Sports, Departments. Competitions are organized at block, district and state levels. State / UT contingents selected in these competitions are sent for the national level competitions.

The Govt. of India politics and programme to promote sports :

Sports policies on the following areas:

- Infrastructure in villages and towns
- Preservation of Play-Fields and Open Spaces
- Nutrition
- Identification of talent
- Sports and physical education in Educational

Institutions :

- Sports Institutions
- Incentives
- Special consideration for employment
- Voluntary efforts

- International competitions
- International exposure
- Priority in competitive sports
- Appropriate equipment
- Promotion of sports and physical education by

Non-Government Institutions

- Research and Development
- Employment of mass media
- Assistance of National Sports Federations (NSFs)
- Sports Talent Search Scholarship Scheme

Sports programmes:

- Grants creation of sports infrastructure.
- Grant to rural schools for purchase of sports equipments and development of playgrounds.
- Scheme for grants for installation of synthetic playing surfaces.
- Grants for promotion of sports in universities and colleges.

Scholarship and awards :

Scholarships to women national champions:

- 50 scholarships are available for women sports persons under this category.
- The value of each scholarship is Rs.18, 000/- per annum (12 months) *i.e.* Rs.1500/- per month.
- Women securing first, second or third positions only in individual events in recognized senior nationals conducted by National Sports Federations as per International rules or National Federation rules will be eligible.

Scholarships to women doing M.Phil/Ph.D in Physical Education:

- 10 scholarships are available for women having Master's Degree in Physical Education and doing M.Phil/Ph.D. in Physical Education under a recognized University.
- The value of each scholarship is Rs.10000/- per annum (12 months).
- The scholarship will be of one year duration and for a maximum period of three years, subject to the candidate fulfilling the eligibility conditions.

Scholarships to women doing NIS Diploma in sports coaching:

- 20 scholarships are available for women holding Master's Degree in Physical Education and admitted for Diploma course in sports coaching at SAI Centres.
- ii) The value of each scholarship is Rs.7500/- per course.

Training of women Physical Education Teachers:

The women physical education teachers holding certificate/diploma in physical education and working in Govt. /recognized schools are trained for six weeks in the Academic Centre of SAI. This is a kind of refresher course, which will generally be organized during the summer vacations. Free board and lodging is provided. Expenditure on 'to and fro' travel by second class rail fare is also reimbursed to them.

Sports fund for pension to meritorious sportspersons:

This is one of the most important schemes of the Government of India, which has been designed to provide incentive as well as an added measure of financial security to sportspersons in recognition of their outstanding performance in identified international competitions, *i.e.* Olympic Games and Asian Games. The Scheme is applicable to sportspersons, who are Indian citizens and have won Gold, Silver or Bronze medals in Olympic Games or Gold medal in Asian Games.

Rate of Monthly Pension:

The rate of monthly pension will be as follows:

- Medalist at the Olympic Games .. Rs. 2000/- p.m.
- Medalist at the Asian Games ... Rs. 1500/- p.m.

Sports Science Research Fellowship Scheme:

- Arjuna Awards
- Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award
- Cash Award to medal Winners in International Sports Events
- National Sports Development Fund
- Assistance to promising sports persons and supporting personnel
- Exchange of sports and physical education teams/ Experts
- National welfare fund for Sports Personal etc...

Conclusion:

Indian women making mark internationally clearly shows that the attitude of our government and society towards women is changing. Indian families understand the importance of their daughter's academics and educational qualifications, to make her independent. However, they still need to understand that encouraging sports among girls is as important for her personality development as her academics are, and the virtues like team spirit, leadership, decision making ability and flexibility can be learned on the sports ground only, not by merely playing ghar-ghar with kitchen sets

The media needs to play a main role to promote the sports and to encourage the Indians women. There is dire need for making more films like, "Chak De India", highlighting the women sports players for their games and for their future.

Definitely, day will come when Indian women will reach a stage where they participate regularly in national and international sports meets. Not only they excelled in different sports events, but they will also be made a mark on the world scene.

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